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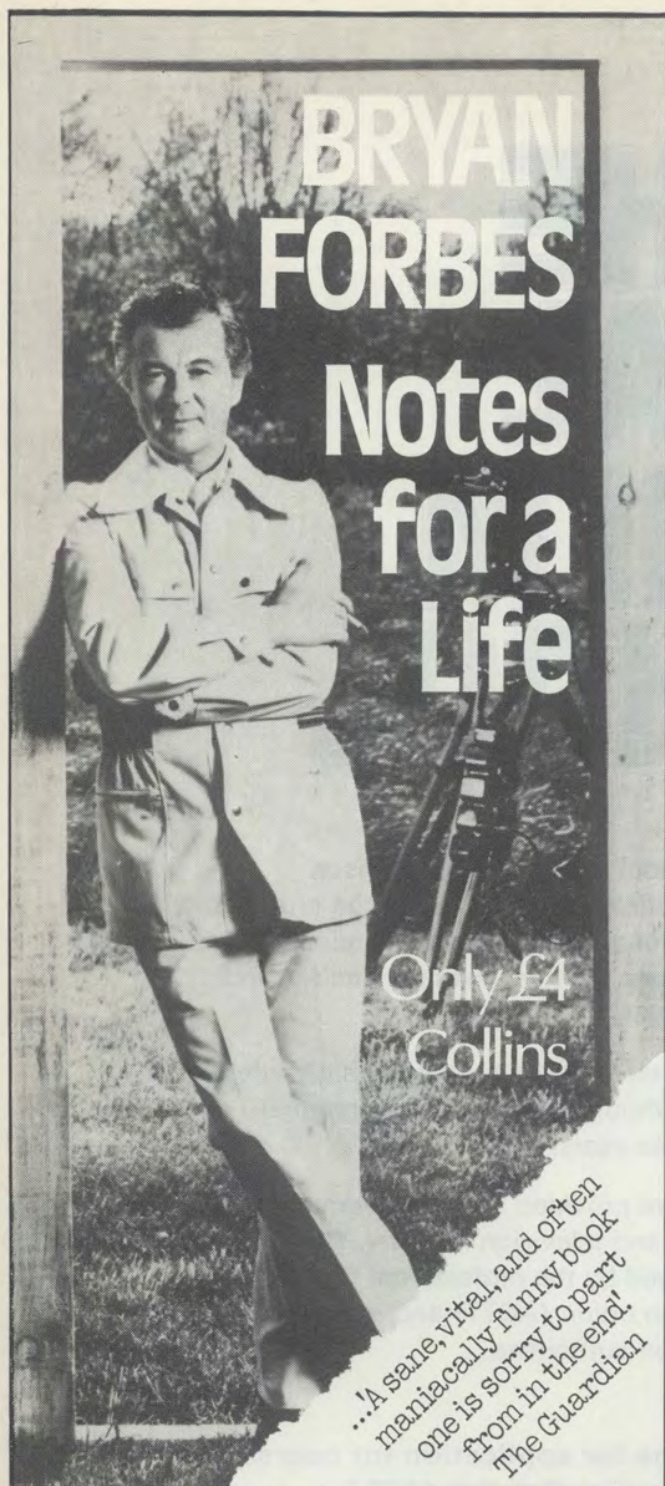
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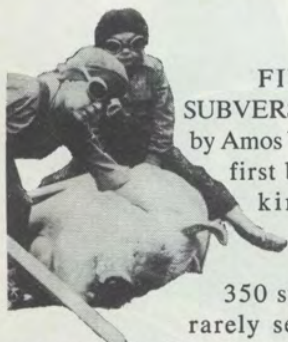
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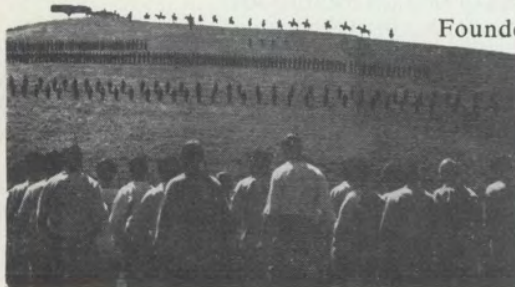


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is the subject of three major articles in the December issue of *University Vision* contributed by Thorold Dickinson, James M. Linton and Robin Wood.

Other contributors include: Tony Aldgate on making the Spanish Civil War film and Ken Ward on a 'film and history' course.

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OZU

DONALD RICHIE



For years the Japanese refused to export Yasujiro Ozu's films on grounds of their excessive "Japaneseness." However, in time his films began to percolate through Western film circles, and little by little Ozu's reputation grew—until now he is regarded, along with Kurosawa and Mizoguchi, as one of the three great masters of the Japanese film. Recently his *Tokyo Story* turned out to be a surprise smash hit in New York, and many of his other films are becoming available at last to Western audiences.

To Richie, whose book on Kurosawa is still often regarded as the best study of a director ever written, Ozu is even more important—because more central to our understanding of Japanese culture and art. The new book is a brilliant piece of cross-cultural interpretation, analyzing Ozu's style, subject-matter, working methods, and philosophical assumptions. By tracing the development of Ozu's films, from their beginnings through scriptwriting, shooting and editing, Richie explicates the artistic strategies and implications of Ozu's work. He then, in a Biographical Filmography, gives a briefer treatment to all the films individually, dealing with their special circumstances of production and their contexts within Ozu's long career.

A special portfolio section of the book reproduces Ozu's sketches, notebook entries, and scripts for a number of films, and illustrates shot-by-shot several sequences which will be especially valuable for students.

Richie's study of Ozu will join that handful of film books which are lasting contributions to the understanding of major artists.

DONALD RICHIE is generally recognized as the most authoritative interpreter of Japanese cinema to the West. He is an American critic who has lived in Japan for two decades. He is author of *The Films of Akira Kurosawa* and co-author (with Joseph Anderson) of the standard history, *The Japanese Film*. Recently he has been Curator of Film at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

275 pages, illus., £7.25

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Paramount PART 2/Gene Kelly Eric Rohmer/Ermanno Olmi Jean Renoir/Special Effects Double Exposure/Japan: History



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WINTER 1974/75

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SIGHT AND SOUND

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On the cover: George Segal and Elliott Gould in Robert Altman's 'California Split'

SIGHT AND SOUND is an independent critical magazine sponsored and published by the British Film Institute. It is not an organ for the expression of official British Film Institute policy: signed articles represent the views of their authors.

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FORMS OF ADDRESS

Tony Rayns
interviews three
German
Film-Makers

FASSBINDER



WENDERS



SYBERBERG

Now that more of the movies are beginning to travel, it's clear that the promise of a resurgent film culture in Germany is being amply fulfilled; since around 1967, there has been a remarkable amount of interesting activity at all levels from the avant-garde to the relatively mainstream. Britain's arbitrary, partial view of this cinema is already yielding what seem to be dominant themes and aesthetic concerns, often suggesting links between the movies of otherwise dissimilar directors.

Fassbinder, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg and Werner Schroeter, for instance, share backgrounds in theatre which inform their handling of actors and their fondness for melodrama and cliché. Opera is a crucial motif in Kluge's *Artistes at the Top of the Big Top: Disorientated*, Syberberg's *Ludwig* and most of Schroeter's movies. Directors as disparate as Uwe Brandner, Volker Schlöndorff, Peter Fleischmann and Werner Herzog have used isolated communities as social microcosms. Fassbinder's bold stylisation has a distinct rapport with the comic-strip simplicity of a 'worker's film' like Christian Ziewer's *Dear Mother, I'm all right*. Herzog's lucid dissections of human capacities for idiocy or madness overlap with Dore O's bizarre psychological fantasias when both directors exercise their taste for surrealist imagery. The pioneer 'structural' film-makers—Werner Nekes, Wilhelm and Birgit Hein—cleared some of the paths towards Wim Wenders' early films, and sparked ideas developed in the narrative work of Klaus Wyborny (whose brilliant *Birth of a Nation* remains a point of intersection for many current theories of film). And many of the narrative movies share a quality of retrospection; several make specific reference to the experience of Nazism. It would be premature to make too much of these conjunctions; some of them will undoubtedly, in any case, prove more apparent than real.

But whether it's homogeneous or not, the sheer range of all this work is itself sufficient evidence that Germany compares favourably with any other European country in its film activity. There are (at least) two reasons for this. One is that the years of non-activity after the war, when for many people there was simply no opportunity to make films, have produced a generation anxious to make up for lost time. Another is the vital role of the German television networks in feature film production. David L. Overbey's account of the latter in the Spring 1974 *SIGHT AND SOUND* misleadingly implies that most directors find the 'conditions' of working with TV money intolerably limiting. In fact, since the founding in 1971 of the influential Munich 'Filmverlag der Autoren' as a production/distribution company specialising in co-productions with TV, it has become almost customary for a director or producer using TV money to retain all rights to his film except those for a limited number of showings on German TV, an arrangement that is scarcely disadvantageous.

Domestic cinema showings of movies already shown on TV are rarely profitable, but can often pay their way; Wim Wenders' *The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty*, for example, was distributed to cinemas some ten months after its premiere on TV, and successfully recouped the cost of prints and promotion. The TV commissions that have enabled Fassbinder to be so prolific have had the indirect effect of now leaving him free to make films either for TV or for the cinema, as he chooses; *Effi Briest* is a cinema movie, while its 'companion piece' *Martha* has been shown only on TV. Furthermore, directors generally get *carte blanche* for their projects once they have been approved by the networks, a freedom that reflects the liberality of a national television that has okayed movies like *Ludwig*, *Birth of a Nation* and *Martha*. And it's interesting that film-makers like Kenneth Anger and Steve Dwoskin found support

from German TV when there was none to be had nearer home.

The three directors interviewed here are all, in one sense, products of TV support. Their careers variously illuminate the cultural and economic circumstances of current German production, although most of the questions sought to investigate the specifically individual qualities of their work. For the record, Fassbinder spoke in German and both Wenders and Syberberg in accomplished English; the responsibility for any errors of translation or inflection of meaning is thus entirely mine.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder: 'I'm a German, making films for German audiences'

An invaluable monograph on Fassbinder recently published in Germany* furnishes a list of his credits to date: since 1967, he has directed 18 features (some for TV), written and directed an 8-hour TV serial, written and/or produced some 25 plays, videotaped three of them, and made numerous acting appearances in his own and other people's films. Apart from their ubiquity as a 'stock company' in his own movies, he and his colleagues from the original Munich 'Action-Theatre' company (which later became the 'Anti-Theatre') can be seen in Straub's *The Bridegroom, the Comedienne and the Pimp*. He has recently moved from Munich to Frankfurt, where he has taken over the Theater Am Turm, and says that he plans to devote more time to the theatre than to film in the immediate future. In 1974 he completed *Effi Briest* (interrupted for over a year by the illness of its male lead), and shot a new film, *Fox*.

When did you decide to work in film and theatre?

*Rainer Werner Fassbinder, edited by Peter W. Jansen and Wolfram Schütte. Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich, 1974. 12.80 DM.

Early, around nine. There was never any other possibility.

You began in theatre?

No, I made two shorts in 1965 and '66. One arose from my love of Rohmer's *Le Signe du Lion*, and the other was... a little like Godard. But at that time every idiot was making films. I felt a great need to work with a group, and I had access to this small 'underground' theatre in Munich where I could try the thing out. Film was always so expensive... Our first play was *Katzelmacher*. I only began writing because publishers didn't want to give us performance rights for the theatre; they didn't see any profits in it. We became 'Anti-Theatre' when the city closed the place. The police moved in. There were various pretexts, but it was mainly because it had become a political theatre.

How did you get back into films?

Love is Colder than Death was made almost entirely without money; we got 10,000 DM from a collaborator, and used that. The film of *Katzelmacher* was made on credit. There was no market for them in cinemas at that time, but we sold the TV rights to them, which paid off our debts and left enough to make *Gods of the Plague*. The films were very theatrical, just as the plays we were doing were very cinematic. I thought that the things I was achieving with actors in the theatre could be tried out in film; you find out what you can take from one medium to benefit the other. Quite soon, though, I was looking for something more purely filmic.

You were influenced a lot by American movies then?

Some of the time. About half the early films were 'about' my discoveries in the American cinema; in a way, they transplanted the spirit of American films to the Munich suburbs. The others generally weren't at all. They were investigations into German actualities: immigrant workers, the oppression of a middle-class office worker, our own political situation as film-makers. *Warning of a Holy Whore* is specifically about the situation of trying to live and work as a group.

Did you think of these as provocative?

Not so much provocative as designed to activate thought processes. I thought then that if you brought people up against their own reality they'd react against it. I don't think that any more. I now think that the primary need is to satisfy the audience, and then to deal with political content. First, you have to make films that are seductive, beautiful, about emotion or whatever...

Like Sam Fuller?

For example. But you still have to know why you're making the film. In other words, use the emotions generated to a particular end. It's a preliminary stage in a kind of political presentation. The main thing to be learned from American films was the need to meet their entertainment factor halfway. The ideal is to make films as beautiful as America's, but which at the same time shift the content to other areas. I find the process beginning in Douglas Sirk's films, or in a film like Hitchcock's *Suspicion* where you leave the cinema feeling that the marriage is an impossibility.

Is that why you prefer melodrama to realism?

I don't find melodrama 'unrealistic';



everyone has the desire to dramatise the things that go on around him. Plus everyone has a mass of small anxieties that he tries to get around in order to avoid questioning himself; melodrama comes hard up against them. Take a film like Sirk's *Written on the Wind*: what passes on the screen isn't something that I can directly identify with from my own life, because it's so pure, so unreal. And yet within me, together with my own reality, it becomes a new reality.

The only actuality that matters is in the viewer's head.

Your films are stylised in a way very different from Sirk's, though.

Sure, because we haven't made films under the same conditions. At least half of his films contain the naiveté of his bosses, the studio heads; for better or worse, we've never had that. That's one of the things that's so good in American films, and you almost never find it in European films. I

long for a little naiveté, but there's none around. However, there are considerable differences between my films. The degree of stylisation grows in proportion with the artificiality of the theme. *Effi Briest* is much more hermetic, in that sense, than *Fear Eats the Soul*, for instance. The theme is partly taken over from the characterisation, and so it has to do with the characters too. The films are very consistent in their attitude to the characters (these days, I try to give each a visible, comprehensible motivation), but what grows from that depends very much on the theme.

Do you find this happening elsewhere in Germany at all?

I don't see much of what I've been talking about in other German directors; they're something quite different, with other possibilities. I've had the opportunity to learn a great deal more than most of them. I do feel a kind of kinship with Volker Schlöndorff; he and I have a somewhat similar attitude to film, and to life.

Why do you keep a 'stock company'?

The group is always renewing itself. I like to work with the same people because the possibilities of agreement are so much better. Otherwise, you're forever going back to the beginning.

Did you intend to build them up as 'stars'?

For me, they are stars.

You try to keep the same crew together as well?

Yes, but it isn't as permanent as it is with actors. They do a lot of TV work, and work for other directors, and it's not possible to have the same continuity. But I've only ever used three cameramen, for instance, and anyway I always check all the shots myself.

How about the design?

I did *Petra* myself. Otherwise it's done for me by Kurt Raab, the guy who plays Haarman in Ulli Lommel's *Tenderness of Wolves*. I tell him what I need; every colour is carefully thought out, each image is prepared.

Does an actor's part in one film relate to his part in another?

For several years I've been trying for extreme variety; the difference between *Merchant of the Four Seasons* and *Petra von Kant* is already very great. In the last few films, it's been changing constantly: *Effi Briest* with Hanna Schygulla, *Martha* with Margit Carstensen, *Fear* with Brigitte Mira. With Hanna, for instance, every time we've tried to take whatever the character has to do with her own personality, and illuminate it from the other side.

Why are some of your projects originals, and others based on existing texts?

If I find a story that's better contrived than I could have done it myself, then I use it. I made *Effi Briest* because Fontane's attitude to his society was a lot like my own, and I'm a German, making films for German audiences.

None the less, a film like *Merchant* has a certain universality...

Yes, it's a story that almost everyone I know has lived himself. A man wishes that he had made something of his life that he never did. His education, his environment,



Top: Hanna Schygulla, Wolfgang Schenck, Karl-Heinz Böhm in 'Effi Briest'. Left: Margit Carstensen in 'Martha'

his circumstances don't admit the fulfilment of his dream.

Petra seems in contrast more private...

Ah, but it's not, people can identify and have done so. Because once again, it's the same subject: everyone has experienced pain in love, and has wished (naturally enough) for a greater love than it was possible to have... most people suffer because they are incapable of really expressing their grief.

It was originally a play?

Yes, but I don't find it a particularly theatrical film. The thing is that the woman in it places herself in a theatrical kind of situation.

You use very long takes in it.

It was strongly linked to the acting. We reckoned that such and such a section was a sequence for the actress and had to be uninterrupted so that she could move through it. That was the first idea governing the film's structure, right from the original dramatic idea.

You've said that you didn't know Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* when you first told the story of *Fear on the soundtrack of An American Soldier*. Was it a surprise to discover it?

No, I was so much in tune with Sirk that nothing surprised me. Sirk has told many stories that I'd like to have done. Here, it's just a matter of a similar story; the films are products of different circumstances. Sirk's is a kind of fairytale; mine is too, but one from everyday life. Sirk had the courage simply to tell the story. I probably didn't trust myself to simply do that. But I'd been wanting to do it for years... I didn't have an actress for it until I met Brigitte Mira, and realised that she could do it. It's a story of two people who are in practically the same situation, who have much the same motives for repressing themselves.

Why did you use those emphatic fade-outs in the film?

I found them right, they were suitable for the kind of story it was. They really only separate events, and determine the passage of time. The same thing is taken to an extreme in *Effi Briest*.

How did you feel about acting in a film like *Tenderness of Wolves*, so obviously influenced by your own work?

Very courageous. Ulli Lommel and I had worked together a lot before then, and it was clear that he'd absorb some of it. But his method of working with actors is quite unlike mine.

What's the film you've just shot?

Fox. It's a film about capitalism. The story of a lottery winner and how he loses his money.

You're planning to work more in the theatre?

Yes, I'm trying to experiment with a group again. In the theatre, I'm more interested in the work, in the process of creation. In film, more in the result. The theatre has a different audience, smaller, more specialised.

What about your TV serial, at the other audience extreme?

About that, I'd have to say again what I've already said about the films. You know that you have 23 million viewers, and you try to find common denominators for an

audience that large, to anchor the political background.

Would you repeat the experience?

If I hadn't done it, I'd do it.

Does that mean you simply wanted to try out the form?

No, I think that TV is the most important thing one can do.

Wim Wenders: 'there's this "everyday schizophrenia"—it's in the way we made the film'

Where Fassbinder went to drama school, Wenders was a film school student; their careers are parallel in that both have moved from small-scale, essentially avant-garde movies into an area of film-making intended for large audiences. Both work through the 'Filmverlag der Autoren' (although Fassbinder—having his own production company—uses it only for distribution); and both have a particular rapport with the young Austrian playwright/novelist Peter Handke, whose latest play was produced by Fassbinder, and whose novel *The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty* provided the basis for Wenders' second feature. This interview, which largely concerns *The Goalkeeper*, was conducted during the post-production work on a third feature, *The Scarlet Letter*. Wenders' latest film is *Alice in the Cities*.

'The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty'

Your early movies flirt with the idea of a narrative while remaining essentially non-narrative.

Yes, even the first film I made at film school had the sense of a 'missing' story. It was called *Shoot Again*, after the thing that lights up on pinball machines. There's only one take, of a man running, repeated four times—hence the title. It's taken from a moving car, and you see only the man's legs and you know that he's been wounded because he loses some blood. But you don't know what's before and after. It's true of *Silver City* too. My films were never completely non-narrative.

That sense of the story being missing might have been funny...

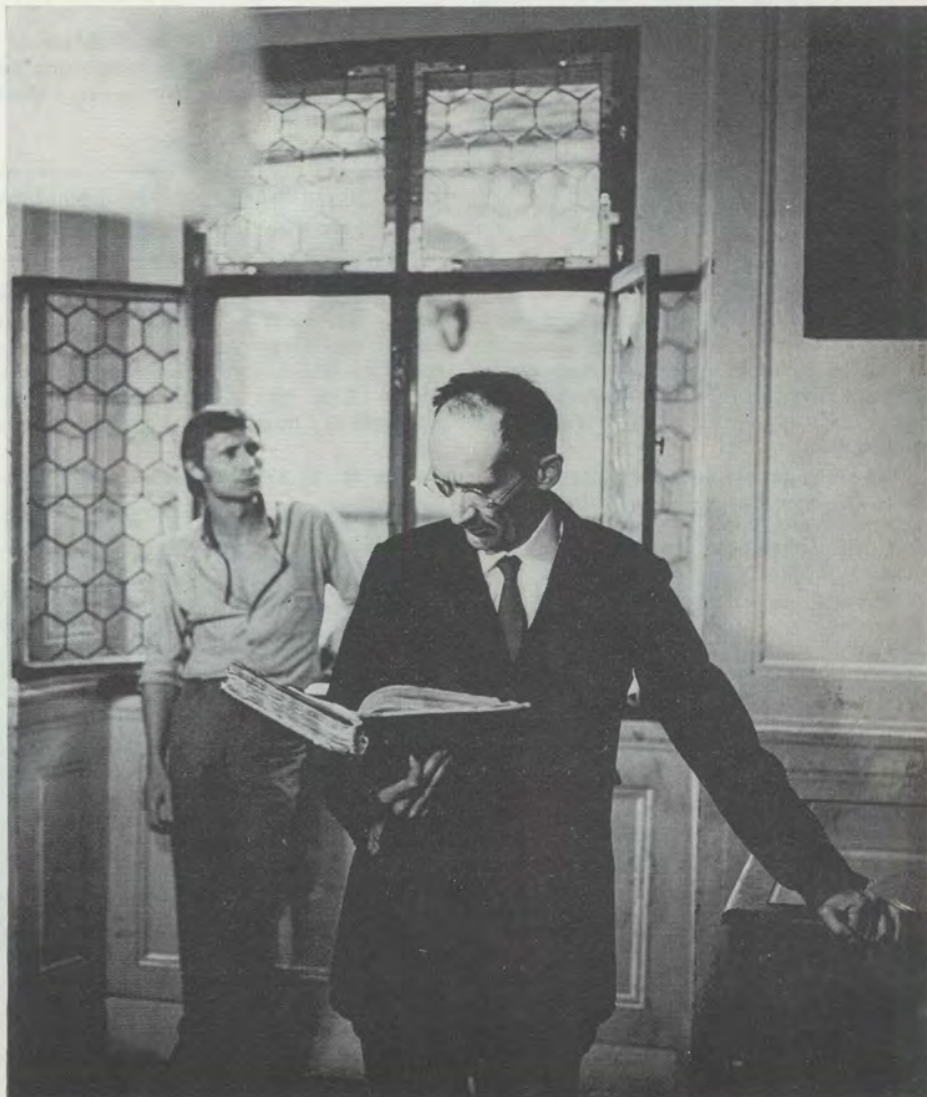
No, *Alabama* is a very depressive film, and *Silver City* isn't funny at all. Because these cities aren't funny.

What's the exact sequence of films?

After *Shoot Again* was *Silver City*, then *Alabama*, in 35mm and already nearly narrative, and then a 3-hour, 16mm black-and-white feature called *Summer in the City* (after the song by John Sebastian) although the film was shot in winter. *The Goalkeeper* was the first non-'underground' film; there was a script for the first time, and so on.

You were a founder of the Hamburg Film Co-op?

I just happened to be. They held the first Hamburg Filmschau in 1967, and I think



they felt ashamed somehow that they were a Hamburg clique. At that time I hadn't made any films, not even the very first, but they invited me, and I became one of the founders.

Was there a group in fact?

In Hamburg, yes. Around Werner Nekes. In Munich too, but there it was much more commercial, in a way.

The Goalkeeper is still like your early films in some ways, but it's also faithful to Handke's novel. Is there a connection?

It may be that the novel has something in common with my other films. I know Peter Handke very well. I was visiting him when he started to write the book, and he said that it was mostly a joke, but that I could use it as the basis for a script if I wanted. A year later we really did it, and it wasn't a joke any more. The film's narrative style, the way one take follows another, is a lot like the book.

Music seems unusually important in all your films.

Yes, very much. It was even the other way round at the start; for the first two films, I had the music first and then added the film. In 1968 I helped a friend make a film in England called *Ten Years After* with the group of that name. It's a 30-minute take of them playing.

In *Goalkeeper*, the juke-box songs seem to be things that Bloch remembers.

Yes, it's a trip into the early Sixties in that sense. Mind you, this part of Austria does look like that, the furniture and everything. They do have those big juke-boxes of the period. It was shot in the village where Handke wrote the novel.

The songs are a kind of commentary...

I realised that recently for the first time, when I saw it again. I listened to the words, and I'm somewhat embarrassed about it. We never thought of that when we used them.

There are also reminiscences of 1940s thrillers here and there.

It's a bit similar to those pictures sometimes, perhaps the compositions. The scene where the plane flies past was supposed to be more like *North by North-West*, but the sun was already very low and so it's not that much like it.

There's some confusion about the movie he goes to see at the start; the theatre marquee says *Red Line 7000* one minute, and something about forgers the next.

Yes it's a big continuity slip. The other title is a novel by Patricia Highsmith, *The Tremor of Forgery*, which I like very much and always wanted to film. I was reading it when we made the film. It wasn't a real cinema, incidentally; we built the fascia over a greengrocer's shop in order to use the building, which is a famous Jugendstil house in Vienna. It was said that they were going to pull it down, so we wanted to use it. We used Wittgenstein's house in one scene for the same reason.

How much did you plan beforehand?

We made drawings every night. For the tracks and everything. We had to work quickly because there were so many different locations—generally, two a day.

Did the actors contribute much?

Yes, a lot. Also the locations, the weather, everything. On the other hand, we worked

very precisely. We tried to stick to the script, but we never really succeeded.

It's an event when you move the camera...

When we started, we thought we could do it without any movement, and we actually did for the first two days of shooting. Then we saw that we could make movements that weren't really movements, that were still very static, and we made a lot of tracks from then on. But always following a moving subject. Except once, with the penalty at the end. I didn't like it.

That formality counters the fact that the viewpoint is essentially Bloch's; it's both objective and subjective.

It has a lot to do with the character; he lacks a feeling of reality sometimes. He's not schizophrenic, but there's this 'everyday schizophrenia'—it's in the way we made the film, too.

How much has his crisis to do with his age? The things that happen to him seem linked to anxieties about holding his own in various situations.

If you're a goalkeeper, you have to change your job at around 35. He's 36. In the script he tells a story about a famous Russian goalie who kept his job until he was 43 or 44. But we didn't shoot it; it would have been too obvious. In the novel he's a former goalkeeper, now working in another job, but that was difficult to explain in the film and so we made him a real goalie. That's the only thing we really changed from the novel. The fact that he's a goalkeeper is sometimes important, in the way that he reacts, for instance.

You cut away from all the climaxes...

I never wanted to show things that are shown in general. Even the murder. I think it's too dramatic.

Hans Jürgen Syberberg: 'like if you have silk and wool coming together'

Syberberg, who is somewhat older than either Fassbinder or Wenders, had worked almost exclusively in television until very recently; his *Ludwig II: Requiem for a Virgin King* was the longest and most elaborate of a number of 'documentaries' on

'arts' subjects made for Bayerischer Rundfunk. A childhood interest in photography chanced to lead him into theatre milieux, and, while still a teenager, to the stage of the Berliner Ensemble, where he shot his first 8mm movie: a complete record of Brecht's production of *Ur-Faust* (shot in what he calls 'a rather adventurous manner'), which he has recently blown up to 35mm for re-examination, as one of the few remaining records of Brecht's theatre practice. He discovered the cinema in Berlin in the early Fifties, when he saw films like *La Belle et la Bête* and *Fanfan la Tulipe*, and was 'much more impressed than with theatre and literature, immediately.'

How did you come to start working in television?

I wanted to go to a film academy, but there wasn't one; I wanted to go to work with a good German director, but there weren't any at that time. So at the age of 18 I went to university, and studied literature and fine arts. When I finished in 1963, I tried again to get a job in films, but there were still no opportunities, and so I went to join a TV company. I very soon got the opportunity to do a 30-minute film on an arts subject; it was lucky enough to be a success, and so I spent the next few years as a freelance film-maker with Bavarian TV. I had to make documentaries of theatre premieres, and soon met the most important stage director of the time, Fritz Kortner (the actor in pre-war films); I made my first big film for TV with him, showing the way he develops one scene from Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* on stage. Only one scene, but this step by step. Kortner was a very difficult director, and so it was more difficult than merely making a reportage. I think it's a very interesting film.

I got a certain reputation from these long documentaries, and then made my first feature *Skarabea* (*How many Earths does a Man Need?*) in Sardinia, based on a story by Tolstoj, in 1968. And then a low-budget film called *San Domingo*; and then *Ludwig*. Meanwhile, I was also still making these long documentaries. One was called *Sex Business, Made in Pasing*, and showed a man making those pseudo-porno films which are very popular in Germany.

'Ludwig II': Balthasar Thomass as the bearded child Ludwig



Why Ludwig as a subject? Had you been interested in him for long?

I knew nothing about Ludwig before I made the film, and nothing about Wagner either. But a lot of people who knew me said I should make a film about Ludwig. It started as a kind of joke; I thought I would make a film like Warhol's *Lonesome Cowboys*. I got the money from TV for that kind of film. I imagined Ludwig on a motorcycle, Wagner in a little car, people with long hair, drugs. I thought that Ludwig should be some kind of a hermaphrodite, a homosexual, that he should sell Bavaria to the Prussians. I invented all these things, and then, when I read the books, I learned that I was right! Reality was in fact much better than my first thoughts. Then, once I knew the historical reality, I had to translate it back into fantasy, in my artificial way of making a film. And that took a long time: to read about him and then forget it.

What dictated your choice of scenes to reveal Ludwig?

From the start, you know that you need certain characters. Wagner, of course, Elizabeth, Gudden, who's important for the end, Holnstein, who was once the lover, Bismarck, and so on. And so one scene influenced the others. If I have this point of view of his character, then I have to have this one too. And put it together. I spent a long time thinking how I might show his childhood, because it's interesting in any man's life, but especially a king's... the scene of his childhood should show the sources of everything. Eventually I forgot about it, and made up my mind to start when he is already the king, the young king, with the scene of him being dressed (it's like the coronation in *Ivan*; we looked at *Ivan* often to see how they move, how it goes). And then, just before we started shooting, I saw a picture postcard showing Ludwig as a child with a beard. He looks very nice, very like Tussauds. I decided to take this little Ludwig for the beginning and end of the film. Now, there's something else. I had also wanted all along to use Lola Montes, as both a Bavarian legend and the character from Ophüls. I saw her coming as a black lady, condemning everybody because she's not invited, as in fairytales, and I wanted to

set her against the figure of Ludwig as a child. When it didn't work, I forgot about it. But when I saw the postcard, it came back, and I saw how I could use the fairytale. But it was different from the original thought: the little Ludwig was not a normal child, but an old man in the stage of childhood. And Lola multiplied into three women, like the witches in the tale. I shot this scene without realising until I saw it projected that it was the 'childhood' scene I'd been seeking for. I had done something I wanted to do, without knowing it. For me, it was an extraordinary discovery.

But the witches at the start are also the Rhine Maidens?

Yes, but I planned that too without realising that it was the scene I always wanted to do, with Lola Montes and the child. I invented it twice. The second time I built it as a joke, from the Nibelungen saga; I was thinking about Wagner or the Norns, and not the psychological things.

That's why you used Wagner as Alberich? Yes.

It introduces the idea of using Wagner's scenes to parallel Ludwig's life, which climaxes with the Liebestod.

Yes, Ludwig's death was another discovery for me. I realised when I looked at the film that he dies three times. Twice I knew, but three times I found out later. And the music I use at the end of the film, again and again, ends three times. I didn't know beforehand, but it's almost the same music that Ludwig heard when Wagner died. He arranged a private performance for himself, and chose nearly the same music.

To what extent did your low budget and short schedule determine the form of the film?

It's hard for me to comment, since the film has been so successful... one French critic even says that the parts that are not 'finished' have a lot of atmosphere. I can agree that the atmosphere carries a lot. But even now I wish we'd had more money, so that we could have shot some retakes. We had no time to do any retakes, and we'd had no experience of the technique. And I'd like to have done more pick-ups, but we had to shoot a new set-up every ten minutes. I'd have needed twice the money to make

the particular aesthetic form very good, because it takes such a lot of time.

Was the form suggested by Méliès?

I didn't know Méliès before, but the French were always invoking him, and so I bought a book about him, and was very content with what I found. I found that others of my films were also in some sense similar. I'd often been a little confused as to where I belonged, because I like to make each film in a different way from the others. Not so usual. Fassbinder is always Fassbinder, Godard is always Godard... but I like to find new paths for every project. Of course, my ideology is consistent from one film to the next, but the form and subjects are quite different. So Méliès is someone I didn't know, but was pleased to discover.

Why use video for the scenes where actors step out of the 'drama' to address the audience directly?

I could easily say that it was because of the money. You see, I could handle the video system myself, without a cameraman and soundman... it's much cheaper. But that's not the only reason. Right from my beginning with film I have liked the rhythm, not only the rhythm of cutting and feeling and juxtaposing pathetic scenes and ironical scenes, but also the bringing together of certain materials. Like if you have silk and wool coming together. I like it when these very brilliant 35mm pictures, with these light-ful projected backdrops, come together with these washed-out videotape images and their monochrome tints. I liked particularly the red ones of tourists in the castle because I wanted to give a very sensitive impression of burning, like an illusion in his mind.

The sound is all direct, but isn't some of it heightened? The squeaking boots?

It just happened that way. Sometimes there was the sound of a light suddenly failing, but we had to go on, we had no time to look for it. People could think it was the sound of a tropical bird.

The lighting seems very accomplished, graduated so that background figures tend to merge with the projected backdrops.

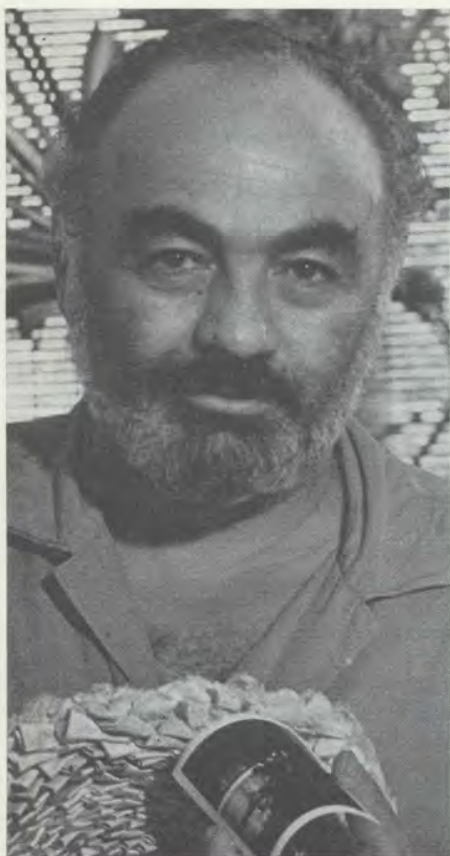
Our cameraman was a young man, and he wasn't used to working in a studio, so he had to experiment. But we made sketches of every scene, and every take was discussed beforehand. We'd have liked to do more cutting, taking in other backgrounds of the same room, but there was only time to do a few—like the scene where he's eating alone, and the people are looking at him. (There, of course, I was thinking of Rossellini.)

There's a fascinating tension between your enthusiasm for Ludwig as a fairytale king and your 'realistic theatricality'.

It belongs to my sources. I started with documentary films, and these were like sketches for paintings. When I make these sketches, I'm very straight, and very fond of detail. Just as at university I learned to read and use books and other information sources. (Which, incidentally, makes my work very difficult for me; I'm not an easy worker, and need a lot of time before I'm ready to shoot.) The opposite of that is that I'm drawn to what doesn't belong to this realistic, historical, documentary side, which I have to get rid of. I was aware of it before, but until I finished *Ludwig* I couldn't be sure how the work would reflect it. ■

'Ludwig's Cook': Walter Sedlmayr





Sergo Paradjanov

THE CASE OF SERGO PARADJANOV

Herbert Marshall

Some forty-four years ago, I happened to be the first English-speaking Westerner to become a student at the then unique All Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow, through the patronage of Vsevolod Pudovkin and later of Sergei Eisenstein. Their genius was then becoming known in the West. But I was the first to reveal two other film geniuses hitherto unknown: Aleksander Dovzhenko and Nikolai Okhlopkov. My report can be found in the September 1930 issue of the avant-garde film journal *Close-Up*. I wrote about two films, Dovzhenko's *Earth* and Okhlopkov's *The Way of the Enthusiast*.

At that time both films were attacked and shelved by the Establishment, which in the Soviet Union was and is only one—the Communist Party. After official cutting and re-editing, *Earth* was eventually released to reap world acclaim; but *The Way of the Enthusiast* was shelved forever. Dovzhenko nevertheless persisted in trying to make films. Okhlopkov refused to make another film, and the world of art is poorer by that act, although he did prove his genius as a theatre director of great originality. From then on, it became clear that there was a new era of cinema art, and it came from the Soviet Union.

In January 1974, Sergo Paradjanov, director of *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* and *The Colour of Pomegranates*, was arrested and charged with homosexuality (a criminal offence in the Soviet Union), illegal currency dealings, and 'incitement to suicide'. The London *Sunday Times* reported this on 27 January, but also that the charges had been dismissed for lack of evidence and that his friends were expecting him to be released. But on 24 May the *New York Times* reported that Paradjanov had been convicted and sent to a labour camp for six years. 'Reliable sources said Mr. Paradjanov was tried recently in Kiev, but they did not know the details about the suicide-incitement charge.'

It appears that at his trial Paradjanov insisted on defending himself, against the advice of friends who knew of his involvement in protests against the arrest of Ukrainian intellectuals. It seems that Victor Shklovsky, the veteran writer with whom at the time of his arrest Paradjanov had been working on a Hans Andersen adaptation, sent a letter to the court in his defence. But Paradjanov refused to allow the letter to be read, on the grounds that it dealt with him as an artist and he was being tried not as an artist but a man. He apparently went on to admit that he was 'partially homosexual' (he has a wife and child). Self-incriminated, he was convicted and sentenced to six years in a hard labour prison camp in the Ukraine, where he is now. According to his friends, who were appalled by his outspokenness in court, the only way in which Paradjanov can be released is by lodging an appeal for clemency and pardon to the Ukraine Supreme Soviet. But they also think that Paradjanov himself will not ask for pardon, since he does not consider he has committed any crime. Herbert Marshall wrote this article following a visit to the Soviet Union in 1973, during which he met Paradjanov.

I recently returned from the Soviet Union with my wife, to report one more parallel on two cinema geniuses. One is Andrei Tarkovsky, already reaping acclaim and prizes abroad, director of *Ivan's Childhood*, *Andrei Rublev* and *Solaris*. The other is Sergo Paradjanov, who with his *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* won sixteen prizes and who then clinched his reputation with a masterpiece, *The Colour of Pomegranates*, crowning what I consider to be the second great era of Soviet cinematography.

On every side—in Leningrad, Moscow, Kiev—we were told there was one film we must see, *The Colour of Pomegranates*. Up till now it had been shelved, but thanks to the re-editing by the veteran director Sergei Yutkevitch (though against the will of Paradjanov), it had achieved a release. It was showing once a day at the *Povtornoie Kino*, Ulitsa Gertsena, Moscow, a third circuit repertory cinema. We had but one day left to see it, and that day turned out to be one of the stormiest in Moscow's history. There were cloudbursts of such violence that the streets were turned into rushing rapids. Most people would not venture out, and we thought that the cinema would be empty. But to our surprise it was crowded.

The film was made in the Armenian Film Studios at Yerevan and was a Russian version. Its main title explained that the story was about an Armenian poet, Aruthin Sayadin, known as Sayat Nova (the film's alternative title), which means the King of Song. He lived from 1712 to 1795 and was famous as a troubadour and creator of love lyrics, which he performed accompanying himself on his national instrument, a lute. He first worked as a weaver, but then became the court minstrel of the Royal House of Georgia, under King Irakli. But then in 1770 he entered a monastery at Hughbat,

and in 1795 was martyred by the Persian invaders.

This Armenian poet is unknown in English, as far as I could find, but a classic Russian translation was made by Valery Bryusov. Bryusov said of him: 'Sayat Nova was a singer who raised the poetry of the troubadour bards to heights not reached before; by the power of genius he transformed the craft of a folk singer into the high calling of a poet. One can say that anything done by the predecessors of Sayat Nova is insignificant before his feats and they fade in the brightness of his glory. Sayat Nova was the first to show, and prove by his own example, what power is hidden in the voice of a folk-singer: he showed that such a singer was not only the entertainer at a feast, but also a teacher, a prophet, however lightheaded the themes of his songs may seem.'*

The main title and subsequent episodes were headed by a quatrain in Russian. Being an 18th century poem to begin with, set in another civilisation, and in translation, it was difficult to understand at first reading, particularly as the length of title was too short. I found this true even for the Russian spectators. As the film progressed it was seen to be entirely episodic, each sequence self-contained; no story line or plot linked the episodes except the evolution of Sayat Nova from boy to youth to man, poet to court minstrel to lover to monk, and the relation of the poet to art, love, death and fate.

The progression is one of incomparably beautiful images and compositions, an endless cornucopia of artistic profusion, that I

*Valery Bryusov, *Selected Works*, II, p. 596. Moscow, 1955. (My translation, H.M.)

can only compare with Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico*. At this first viewing I made no notes but let the unending beauty of the film pour over my consciousness, noting only that I should have to see this many times to imbibe and understand it. Now let me enjoy it. I can only give an impressionistic description of what I remember—I cannot vouch for the utter accuracy of my description—the profusion of images and metaphors and concentration of material is maximum.

We see, for example, the young boy in the middle of a courtyard, surrounded by ancient rock-like buildings... then on the paving-stones at his feet appears a manuscript, a great tome, then another, then a third and another and another, until he is in a sea of books, then slowly the wind rises and begins to flutter the pages of the great tomes and turns them over, till gradually hundreds of pages are being turned in the breeze... (There is no dialogue, no commentary, only the sound of what one presumed was Armenian chanting of Sayat Nova's original poems and the music of medieval instruments)... the boy is imbibing knowledge... then suddenly he is on the roof of the ancient building (palace or castle or monastery? nothing is explained) and there, too, the books and manuscripts multiply and their pages turn in the wind... another quatrain appears... the boy is a youth... another verse... he is a man... a poet at the Court... suddenly court musicians appear and play on their lutes from manuscripts at their feet... behind them hang and turn angelic cherubs... then suddenly they are three graces bearing garlands and their manuscripts are held up by two black pages in beautiful silk robes and the angels turn and turn... then comes the Muse of poetry and it is the poet's beloved... clad in magnificent robes, a fantastic flowery head-dress, and twisting vines... and now the court minstrel becomes a monk... in a great church, frescoes of saints looming... he is on his knees in white, asking absolution from his Muse with the face of his beloved and between then an empty shard... then slowly she draws across her face an endless veil of white lace, coquettishly in the Eastern fashion... then it is in black lace... and then suddenly they change places and she is in his clothes... they are one.

Another quatrain... his family... his mother... his father prancing by on a horse... then the monk is digging a grave... he gets into it and disappears... his mother prepares for the ritual of the sacrificial white cockerel for the souls of the dying... and before our eyes the white cockerel's throat is cut, the red blood spurts, the mother sacrifices to St George for the soul of her son to have a white cockerel crow for him as he ascends to heaven... but he reappears again from the grave... then suddenly in the courtyard an Eastern warrior appears, he fires from a crossbow at the poet-monk... the arrow strikes the monastery wall which sheds tears of blood... then his beloved is lying all in white on a bier in the middle of a cathedral nave... is he digging the grave for her?... then gradually into the nave surges a flock of white sheep until he and she are hemmed in on all sides by sheep...

In 1795 the Persians led by Aga-Mohammed-Khan invaded Georgia and threatened

Tbilisi with massacre. Learning of this, the aged bard, Sayat Nova, now Bishop David, left his secluded monastery and rushed to the capital, in order to rescue his family. He managed to extricate his children from the city to Mozdok, where they were safe. But the poet himself didn't succeed in escaping, or did not want to desert his fellow citizens in danger. So Sayat Nova was in Tbilisi on the very day the city was captured. The poet-bishop together with a crowd of his people prayed on their knees inside the Cathedral. The Persians demanded they should all come out of the Cathedral and accept Mohammedanism. Sayat Nova answered with a verse in the Tartar language: 'From the Cathedral, no! Never will I recant Christ!' The Musselmén dragged the old man by force out of the Cathedral and murdered him on its threshold.

Now in that place a stone plinth has been erected, on which is engraved the date of his birth and death and three lines of his verses:

'Not everyone can drink my rushing spring—my waters have a very special taste.'

'Not everyone can read my writing—my words have a very special meaning.'

'Nor believe it easy to overthrow me—my foundations are as firm as granite.'

(Translation from the Russian by H.M.)

As I said, these are a few impressions, no more. The impact of this stream of original images and visual metaphors was overpowering. Such a film must be viewed many times and the original poem studied. Although the director himself intimated that it was but a springboard for his creative fantasy. It is clear that the theme is universal. It is another Abelard and Heloise of the times, with the same conflict of love and the Church, the poet and society, poetry and dogma, poetry and death.

The style of the film is unique for Soviet cinema. Though national in form it is not socialist-realist in content. The universal trend away from story and plot and narrative is now clearly established in the Soviet Union. The accent is now on folklore, national culture, a stress on image and metaphor and fantasy, on quantum jumps in space and time. The most Ukrainian film since Dovzhenko's *Earth*, *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* was made by an Armenian, Paradjanov, who has even been accused of Ukrainian nationalism! Now in *Sayat Nova* he has made a national Armenian film. Yet both are quite original in form and style. In fact I saw in Paradjanov's films reflections of the teaching of Eisenstein, in particular his essays on colour and the last letter he ever wrote, addressed to Kuleshov, in which he said, inter alia:

'Not an object in a story and not an object in a photograph gives birth to colour, but the music of the object and the peculiarity of the inner, lyrical, epic and dramatic reverberations of the story.'

'Not the objective colour of grass, a bridge, a night café or a guest room, determines their colouring in the film, but the way of looking at them, which arises out of one's attitude to them.'

*Eisenstein's *Collected Works*, III, p. 487. (My translation, H.M.)

So in *Shadows* Paradjanov shows a man being struck and killed with an axe, and blood pours over the screen, and the next sequence is totally in red. So in *Sayat Nova* an arrow strikes the wall and draws blood from it. This is the opposite of naturalism. In fact, it is the intellectual cinema Eisenstein called for and was not himself allowed to make, but which is now being created by students of his Cinema Institute.

In fact, it can now be seen as a new school of Soviet cinematography that, given the proper conditions, could rival the golden age of the Twenties, when Soviet Russia produced Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dovzhenko and Vertov. But will the Communist Party voluntarily create the proper conditions, and not continually 'shelve' or censor or ruthlessly cut masterpiece after masterpiece? They should be proud of such talents.

But it is not only the bureaucratic dogmatists who are the stumbling block: more often than not it is the artists' own professional colleagues who influence Party decisions. They are scornfully named the 'Akademiks'. Such opposition to new schools in art by the old schools is a universal phenomenon, but only in totalitarian countries are they able to wield such power. It consists of a great deal of jealousy, envy of greater skill and talent, and sometimes just a complete inability to understand what the new school is up to. Pushkin saw this clearly in his little tragedy *Mozart and Salieri*, where Salieri, the Academic of the old school, poisons Mozart out of jealousy for his genius. There are many Salieris in Soviet society. The works of art they produce get few prizes in the international arena, 'socialist realism' and the officially approved films get ruthlessly criticised, and so the Union of Cinematographers is in a dilemma, it has to send the unorthodox or shelved films to foreign festivals to win prizes. Thus Paradjanov's *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* collected no fewer than sixteen international prizes. Never since Eisenstein's triumph had a Soviet director enjoyed such international esteem. So with Tarkovsky's banned *Andrei Rublev*, only afterwards shown inside the Soviet Union.

Yet there are many other shelved films that could equally be winning prizes for the Soviet Union. For example, here are a few: an original screen version of Dostoyevsky's short story *A Bad Joke* by that brilliant pair Alov and Naumov. An account of rural life in Russia today, *Asya's Happiness*, by Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky (who co-scripted *Rublev* with Tarkovsky). *The Enigmatic Indian*, about the life of Soviet intelligentsia, by Peter Todorovsky. A satire on Soviet life in general, *Welcome* by Elem Klimov, etc., etc. So many banned films.

On examination it will be found that those films which show a truer reflection of Soviet life are the ones which are banned; those which show it through rose-coloured glasses are approved. Any student in the Soviet Union will quote his Marxist teaching that all art is a reflection of the society that creates it; as a consequence, even films about past history, non-Soviet society, are banned. Just as Part II of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* was banned for fifteen years. Tarkovsky said in an interview in the Soviet press: 'I do not understand purely historical films which

have no relevance for the present. For me the most important thing is to use historical material to express man's ideas and to create contemporary characters.'

So with Paradjanov; and it will be recognised how close the theme of *The Colour of Pomegranates* is to *Andrei Rublev*—in both cases, an artist monk suffers in an alien society. Significantly, in both these films, as in *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors*, religion and religious services are treated with respect, even reverence, for the first time in the history of Soviet films. This is what causes most trouble with the Party censors. Just as their contemporary—the painter Ilya Glazunov—originally got into trouble for painting in the ikon style of Rublev and was not accepted into the Union of Soviet Artists.

The recent attack on Soviet modernist artists by the dogmatists and Akademiks, using bulldozers and fire-hoses against abstract canvases, is the latest example of this struggle. However, world reaction to such barbarism has its effect; now the modernist artists are allowed to exhibit their works publicly, even if not approved by the Communist Party. And one can now see that a new era of Soviet art has arrived—and one of its geniuses is Paradjanov.

Naturally, we wanted to meet him. On every hand we were urged to—but there were some reservations. 'He's very difficult.' 'He's crazy, of course.' One fellow student who graduated from GIK at the same time as Paradjanov told me that he was a strange fellow. (For example, when he was shooting his Diploma film, he was supposed to have smoke, but the VGIK studio couldn't supply him with smoke-bombs to achieve this effect. They said he had to do without it. So what did he do? In the middle of the studio floor he tore a piece off his trouser leg and set fire to it. The burning cloth gave the smoke effect he wanted. He shot his Diploma film as he had planned—with the smoke.)

Such remarks in the present atmosphere were not very helpful—in view of the world's criticism of the Soviet use of such accusations to put awkward critics under psychiatric treatment. We were therefore apprehensive. However, we did persuade a friend to telephone him and tell him that visitors from the outside world wanted to pay him homage. He was sceptical at first but, convinced, he invited us to come to his home. He lives in a suburban part of Kiev, in a very unprepossessing highrise building, on the 9th floor. We rang the bell, the door opened, and out bounded a stocky bundle of dynamite with a beard, followed by a group of males and females. There could be no doubt who was Paradjanov.

We had been warned, not only that he was crazy but also very generous, and being from the Soviet East, he would at once give us anything he had that we expressed a liking for. So we were careful. But we did take a souvenir for him. Well, from the first friendly greeting to the very last warm and sincere farewell we saw not the slightest sign of craziness, madness, or awkwardness. We had met one of the sanest men in the Soviet Union. We found a temperament abounding with passion and fire, with imagination and humour, with honesty and

frankness. Traits rare in a society where everyone has always to be on the *qui vive*, above all with foreigners, and particularly at his moment in time. He was frank in his criticisms of everyone, including himself. Generous in his praise of those who might be considered rivals, as for instance, Tarkovsky. 'He is a genius,' Paradjanov said, 'I am proud to be his contemporary. It would be criminal if our Soviet Government didn't make sure he was making one film a year.' He went on: 'Tarkovsky is a phenomenon—astonishing, unrepeatable, and beautiful. I would have had nothing to do and would have done nothing if there hadn't been *The Childhood of Ivan*.' He also praised Fellini, by whom he had been influenced.

His apartment reflected his character—it was crammed with all kinds of things, antiques, pictures, ikons, pottery, tapestry, carpets, bric-à-brac. About which he commented: 'Gerasimov (a veteran film-maker and teacher at GIK) said to me, "You want to stuff into one film enough for twenty films!" And I reply—that's how it can have quality. The sphere of cinema is quality. That's where I belong, I am a man seeking truth.'

'People come to my house and exclaim: "My God, how many things you've got stuffed in here!" Yet it seems to me that I haven't enough!'

On closer inspection, however, one realised the source of his visual talent—there was not one picture, sculpture, photo, work of art, antique, that in some way or the other had not been transformed by Paradjanov's fantasy. No single work was on its own as created. It became part of a total artistic montage. Every piece was fused with another unexpected piece: a photo became a photo-montage, a painting became a collage, a classic sculpture became a modern caricature, an ikon merged into a modern bas-relief. And this fantasy of Paradjanov was revealed in his movements and his conversation. He spoke like a machine-gun, at such speed and yet with such clarity. Almost in one breath he told us the story of one film he wanted to make. I recorded it—and will have one hell of a job transcribing it, let alone translating it. When photographs were inevitably to be taken, after the first few 'normal' shots, his fantasy set to work. No, it could not be just a 'naturalistic' photo of a group—he at once took things from the wall, from the table, from a cupboard, bowls, curtain, carpet, stick—and we were transformed into artistic images. My wife gave him a colour reproduction of her famous statue of Mahatma Gandhi—before we said goodbye it was already hanging in a place of honour framed in an ikonostas! He admired her sculpture, and already he was giving her ideas for future development as sculpture. He was generous with everything.

We of course were introduced to the others present, who were relatives, friends, disciples, artists—they were all his family—and we were invited to dine at the table which was weighed down with food. The kind that no tourist ever sees in an Intourist hotel or restaurant, no matter how much foreign currency he pays. And here, too, Paradjanov was not satisfied with routine dishes. No, he had two friends make a special goulash and khebab in our honour.

We were served on earthenware dishes from Samarkand and ate with Russian wooden spoons. It was a feast of Lucullus, with, of course, Georgian wine and the inevitable toasts: 'To Soviet-American Friendship', 'For the Brezhnev Nixon Agreement' and our own tribute to the genius of our host—Sergo Paradjanov, the Armenian from Georgia, now an honorary Ukrainian in Kiev.

But behind the banter and the intellectual fireworks and the generous hospitality was a deadly serious problem: Paradjanov made his last film in 1969, *The Colour of Pomegranates*, and it was banned. I understand he submitted various scripts and projects, to Armenian, Georgian, Estonian studios—rejected. Then one script was accepted by the Dovzhenko Studios, Kiev, about the great Cathedral of Kiev, St. Sophia, and its famous frescoes, but this was halted after the first edited rushes had been screened. He had brought to life the sacred frescoes with such reality that they shocked. He presented a treatment of the epic poem *The Demon* by the classic poet Lermontov, based on the illustrations of the 19th century painter Vrubel. But, nevertheless, it was rejected. And Shklovsky with his wry humour commented, 'Well, of course, the Demon wasn't in it.'

Then he prepared a film treatment about his own family in Tbilisi. It appears they have a family grave in an old Tbilisi cemetery, where his Armenian forefathers are buried, and his father and sister, and where his mother wants to be laid to rest and where Paradjanov himself said he would be buried. Then one day on a visit he discovered that a fence had been erected around it. Notices went up NO TRESPASSERS! Workers and machines were moving in. He was not allowed to enter. Then he discovered that the cemetery was to be eradicated to make room for a 'Park of Culture & Rest'. The bulldozers and steam-shovels were moving away dozens of graves at a time, skeletons and all. Paradjanov had photographs taken of all the proceedings and prepared a kind of story-board for his proposed film treatment. It was this treatment he recounted to us and which I recorded. It was a hair-raising and brilliant treatment—but it cannot be made, though he says it would be the cheapest production ever, with only two living characters: his mother and himself. The rest are all dead!

But this will never be made into a film, that is clear. So Paradjanov has not been able to make a film since *St. Sophia* was aborted. He has no other livelihood, but friends on every side helped him to survive. He was given a minor acting part in *Solaris* and was, I believe, offered a leading role in *Rublev*, but turned it down. Finally he was commissioned to write a script for the State Television Studios, for a series based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy stories. His friends say his fantasy and talent would liven up the dull fare of Soviet TV, and that I can concur with. Soviet television is far behind Soviet cinema. His first treatment was not found acceptable, but the veteran scriptwriter Victor Shklovsky agreed to collaborate with Paradjanov, and they were working together amicably on a new film treatment of the stories.

As I have said, *The Colour of Pomegranates* is



'The Colour of Pomegranates': Sayat Nova asks absolution from his Muse

an intellectual film and at its first showing to foreign distributors, after its re-editing and cutting, it did not get over. At first no one took it for foreign commercial exhibition. This was a blow not only to Sovexportfilm but to its director. For now the Soviet Union is very concerned with earning foreign currency, and so on top of being a 'difficult' film, as they term it, having had Party disapproval, it now adds insult to injury by not even earning foreign currency outside (like *Rublev*). However, just as we left Russia, we heard that it had been taken up by a foreign distributor and was having its first showings in West Berlin.

I urge my American and British film colleagues to book this film—it will create a sensation. But a careful commentary must be prepared using the original Armenian soundtrack, first class translations of Sayat Nova's poetry must be done and more preliminary explanation than the Russian version carries must be given. I understand there is a conflict between foreign distributors and Sovexportfilm, who insist that not only Russian but all national films go out with a dubbed Russian soundtrack, even though the original may be Georgian or Uzbek. This, of course, is quite anomalous and destructive of the artistic qualities of the original soundtrack, and even contrary to their own slogan of 'National in Form'.

It is to be hoped that now, with the upsurge of Soviet national cinema art, these new talents may not only be recognised and their films 'unshelved', but that their brilliant directors may be able to go on making films, however unorthodox or 'difficult' they may seem to be.

Let the Soviet Union remember that even the world-famous films of Russian cinema's golden age were not recognised first in their own country. Only after the shattering success of *Potemkin*, *Earth* or *Mother* in the West did they belatedly receive proper recognition and first class distribution in the Soviet Union. It was the West who made them realise they had created a new era in cinema art. Eisenstein's books were first published in America and England.

Now, once again, let them take notice. Today there is a new era of art in the Soviet Union, and not just limited to the cinema but in every form of art—theatre, painting, music, poetry, sculpture—and by and large they are 'difficult' works, created irrespective of the official dictates or the tastes of the Akademiks. It is a tide they cannot stop however much they try. It is a tide they should proudly exhibit and encourage. Though such works of art may have been created in spite of the official decrees, nevertheless these new talented artists are Soviet

artists and they are multi-national, whether of the older generation like Solzhenitsyn or Shostakovich, Alexander Galich or Bulat Okudjava, or the younger ones. Glazunov or Lubimov or Efros, Ilyenko, Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky, Tarkovsky or Paradjanov—and these are but a few—and others are springing up through all the republics, whether rejected or unrejected, shelved or unshelved, recognised or damned, members of the Trade Unions or not, they are *your* Soviet children!

No matter how much their genius may cause you unease or shock you or criticise you or infuriate you—they are productions of your Soviet society, a dialectical evolution from your revolution. No matter what you do now, you cannot liquidate them or imprison them or psychoanalyse them all or make them non-persons. There are now too many of them, they are no longer single units, they are a new movement, part of a tide, a new era of Soviet artists—and no matter what you do to them the world has to pay its tribute to their genius and their bravery, no matter what the social structure may be. And what happens to your artists is as much our business as what happens to ours is yours; and the works of art they create are as much ours as yours. Genius belongs to mankind. Art belongs to all the inhabitants of planet earth.

Chance meetings:

LE FANTÔME

'It is in the nature of poets to say more than they know, and Cervantes was carried away by the current of the theme he had discovered far out of his depth.'

—Gerald Brenan: 'The Literature of the Spanish People'

'I read Freud in Spanish.'

—Buñuel interviewed by André S. Labarthe

As with every new Buñuel film, there was symbol-hunting all over Paris when *Le Fantôme de la Liberté* opened last September. Sold to the public as a social comedy, and a bit salacious at that, it has since chalked up 400,000 entries in Paris alone and become the season's great comic attraction, rivalling *La Moutarde me Monte au Nez*, which is something new for a Buñuel picture. Success has brought about a revision of the old Buñuel image; the current one being circulated here is that of a genial, mischievous grandfather (Buñuel is 74 this year) with a new tolerance for the quirks and foibles of the bourgeoisie, as if age and popular recognition had finally instilled charm and discretion in the old reprobate.

What seems more relevant is that, as a director grows older, he tends to return to the films of his youth. It's true of Fellini, of course, and true also in a way of Hitchcock and Cukor, and now of Buñuel. While not exactly *L'Age d'Or* revisited, *Le Fantôme de la Liberté* is just as episodic, violent, exalting and exasperating as that early film; a number of direct quotes remain in the release print. To summarise its plot is frustrating but necessary. Buñuel usually spins his films the way most people describe their dreams. But this time around, he has delivered a pack of shaggy dog stories.

During the Napoleonic occupation of Spain, a French officer, Bernard Verley, playfully attempts to kiss the lips of a statue representing a Spanish noblewoman dead for centuries and entombed in the cathedral of Toledo. He is nearly crushed by a marble slap from the statue of her consort. In revenge, the dragoon orders the mausoleum to be desecrated, whereupon his soldiers uncover the perfectly preserved body of Doña Elvira. . .

This bit of Spanish Gothick enlivens the afternoons of a modern-day nursemaid, Muni, while her charge, a luscious Lolita, is accosted in a Paris park by a Peter Lorre type who presents her with a set of picture postcards after obtaining from her a promise of secrecy. Back home, the girl shows the cards to her parents, Monica Vitti and Jean-Claude Brialy, who fire the nursemaid on the spot, then settle down to savour them. The postcards turn out to depict tourist landmarks, and one showing the Milan *duomo* drives them into a frenzy of sexual nostalgia. Tossing sleeplessly in bed that night, Brialy is successively visited by a rooster, a woman in mourning, a postman delivering a letter, and an ostrich.



Nurse and friars: Paul Le Person, Milena Vukotic, Marcel Pérès, Bernard Musson, Gilbert Montagné

Trying next day to convince his doctor that the visitations were not a dream, the letter being proof, Brialy is interrupted by the doctor's nurse, Milena Vukotic, who requests permission to join her sick father in the provinces. On the road, she runs into a tank division looking for foxes. At an inn, that evening, the nurse engages in a game of poker with four friendly friars, unaware that in another room a very young man and a very old woman are going through the trials and delights of a lovers' tryst. The game and the romantic pursuit are interrupted by a masochist, Michel Lonsdale, who fails to enlist them (even the friars!) as an audience for his whipping session.

The following morning, the nurse resumes her trip and, on her way, drops an instructor, François Maistre, at the police academy where he lectures on the relativity of manners and morals, describing a chic social gathering at which the guests defecate together, then discreetly withdraw to eat in privacy. Two of his *gendarme* students go on duty, picking up a speeding driver, Jean de Rochefort, whom they release so that he will not miss a doctor's appointment. At the doctor's the driver learns that he is all right, save for a touch of cancer. He returns home to learn that his daughter is reported missing from a nursery school, despite the little girl's attempts to make everyone notice her presence. The parents, accompanied by the missing child, report the disappearance to a police inspector, Julien Bertheau, who promises to help.

A sniper, Pierre Levy, goes on a rampage from the top floor of the Tour Montparnasse, is apprehended, tried and sentenced to death, then released as a popular hero of the day.

The inspector summons the parents of the (missing) child to report that she has been found. He is about to explain how and

where when he remembers a pressing appointment. In a bar, he notices an Italian woman, Adriana Asti, who reminds him of his dear, dead sister. His reminiscences are cut short by a telephone call from the dead woman; after identifying herself beyond doubt, she asks the inspector to meet her at the family crypt. That night, the inspector is arrested as he pries open his sister's coffin. He is remanded in the custody of another police inspector, Michel Piccoli, who seems to have succeeded him overnight, and they both attend a bloodbath at the zoo.

Like a transcendental Gracie Allen, Buñuel never finishes a story, leaving episodes to dangle or peter out, or cutting them short to go into the next one. As such, we are never informed of the contents of Brialy's letter, never grasp the meaning of the friar's anecdote, never learn the details of the little girl's recovery. As the film switches attention from one character to another, an incidental role takes the spotlight for a short spell in which it sets up the mechanism of a story, then is superseded by another without a chance to deliver the punchline. As soon as a structure of broken threads is accepted in lieu of the usual linear progression, one becomes aware that the film could wander off in a number of directions; and after squirming at the digressions and bracing ourselves for the interruptions, we end up considering possible alternatives.

What if, instead of joining the nurse after the night at the inn, we tagged along with the masochist, or the friars, or the gerontophile? 'We must celebrate the hazard that brought us together in this place,' toasts the masochist. Haphazard, more likely. In *The Exterminating Angel*, another group of people, also brought together by chance, could never leave each other's company. In

DE LA LIBERTE

Carlos Clarens



The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, they could never agree when or where to have dinner. In *Le Fantôme de la Liberté*, they cannot remain for long within the same film. Perversely, their frustration has been transferred to us.

Two-thirds into the picture, a sketch, complete in its own absurdity, functions as *caesura* and also as the one workable key to the film. The sniper's tale is crudely introduced (a shot of the killer's shoes follows on a shot of the inspector's) and casually closed (with an offscreen commentary). Clumsily stuck on the film, it remains none the less mutedly terrifying, as the sniper races from window to window to lay waste the city at his feet. On a bright spring morning, death strikes silently, without warning or discrimination, passion or logic. Death, in fact, is an interruption that cancels a number of possible fictions: that of the casual tourist, the housewife, the workman, all of whom have only death in common. Every time the sniper hits a mark, he becomes a fictional counterpart of the director.

Is this the one possible reading? *Le Fantôme de la Liberté*, as misleading a title as that of *Un Chien Andalou*, is undoubtedly about the presence of death: the fusillades, Brial's intimations of his own mortality, cancer, excremental pollution, the various manifestations of the death-wish (masochism, gerontophilia, necrophilia)... But this most sober of themes elicits from Buñuel a dose of gallows humour and a playful school of red herrings. For beginners, he takes his *coterie* to pieces. The opening shot, Goya's 'Fusilamientos de la Moncloa', is a sop to, as well as a jibe at, the complacent Sadoul mentality with its penchant for pigeon-holing cultural references. ('Goya, always Goya! That's all the world knows about Spain. To spread its culture, a country must have guns.')

Regardless, Goya turned up as usual in most Paris reviews, demonstrating once again that a director worthy of the name directs not only his audience but his critics as well.

Only the Spanish prologue is derived from a story by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, yet the entire film is credited to that nineteenth century romantic, almost unknown abroad. Appearing as a monk calmly awaiting execution by the French, Buñuel braces himself with a wry metaphor against the inevitable *malentendu*. He also seems to deem the French incapable of grasping the true flavour of *Vivan las cadenas!*—the proverbial Spanish cry of allegiance to Fernando VII, a bad king, a weak king, but a Spaniard nevertheless—for he provides a toned-down version, via subtitle, in *A bas la liberté!*

Buñuel the Entomologist, another helpful cliché, is next. Brial is presented as a collector of spiders: as we all know by now, the spider has a fixed value in the Buñuel symbolic scale ('Sex is a black tarantula'); but what of the rooster, straight out of *Los Olvidados*, that struts about Brial's bedroom at night? Buñuel delivers his films in sustained takes not exempt, despite the carefully composed scripts, from a certain automatic writing; and by his own admission he edits rapidly, in two or three days, since montage amounts to a critique of the filmed material. Some scenes, nevertheless, are improvised; like the final shot, a close-up of an ostrich staring unflinchingly at the camera, which was thought up on location at the Vincennes Zoo. Buñuel is a master at leaving his films tantalisingly open... like a trap. How much of the ostrich is deliberate symbol, how much is a pun on Buffon, who maligned the species? 'Above all, no psychology' has been quoted often enough to serve as the official Buñuel motto. A certain gesture of Geneviève

Page's hand in *Belle de Jour* was construed by many viewers as obscene, when it was simply a gesture dissociated from any significance, consciously arrived at by director and performer. In his lifework Buñuel has furnished enough of these to establish a *catalogue (ir)raisonné*.

One of the prerequisites of psychoanalysis demands that the subject be permitted to express himself in his mother tongue. Being the most reliable link with the early stages of consciousness, language must obviously play an important part in free idea association. And, partly obscured by the more familiar and fashionable Surrealist references, a deeply Spanish sense of transcendence survives in Buñuel's work, linking together, regardless of locale and theme, the Mexican films with the French ones, even with *The Young One*. In his formative years, Buñuel must have been influenced by Quevedo as well as by Aragon, by Valle Inclán as much as by Breton, by *La Vida es Sueno* as deeply as by *Les Vases Communicants*. If the Surrealists postulated the contiguity of dream and reality, Lope de Vega and Calderón wove the two together in a characteristic Spanish pattern. Unlike its predecessors (*The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *Tristana*, *Belle de Jour*), all of which allowed their characters to escape into their dream fantasies, Buñuel's latest resolutely sticks to the real. Indeed, certain sequences in the picture have the flat, perfunctory look of French television commercials, at least until something incongruous or something marvellous begins to filter through. In a sense, *Le Fantôme de la Liberté* is Buñuel's most Spanish film in a long while.

'I believe that doubt alone makes man go forth.' The ending of *Nazarín* was read by many as a mystic's discovery of the merely human. Nazarin, the priest who never once questioned his faith, is disconcerted by a pineapple offered to him by a poor peasant woman on his way to prison. Buñuel intended this as a first blow to the priest's certainty. His films, ideally, should function like the pineapple (which, in Spanish, is the same word as 'blow') and rather than put one critically at ease, should leave us in doubt as intended. ■

Police inspectors: Julien Bertheau, Michel Piccoli





RENOIR'S

WILLYS

Tom Milne



'Le Petit Théâtre de Jean Renoir': 'Le Dernier Réveillon'

If there is one single sequence in Renoir's work which clearly divides the sheep from the goats—the sheep being dedicated Renoirophiles, who in their total allegiance risk being accused of mindless docility by the goats—it is probably the one in *French Cancan* where, in a little moonlit square in Montmartre, Nini renounces the love of her prince. Even in a film whose keynote throughout is affectionate idealisation in its reconstruction of the Paris of the Nineties, the little square, with its studio grass and its studio tree lit by a moon shining from a cyclorama sky, is impossibly unreal. Deliberately so, of course, since Nini is faced, in the best Shakespearean tradition, with a choice of three suitors. Two represent forms of reality—domestic bliss and theatrical success—and these she disposes of amid

Until the recent emergence into cinemas of *Le Petit Théâtre de Jean Renoir* (made for TV in 1969 after an eight year silence since *Le Caporal Épinglé*), it seemed that the Renoir battle had been won. With even *The Diary of a Chambermaid* and *Eléna et les Hommes*—respectively the most misunderstood of his American and later French films—now revalued and more or less respected, only the most stubbornly blinkered critic could revert to the once commonly held opinion that the great social-realist of the Thirties had started to degenerate, circa 1940, albeit with tranquil charm (*The River*) and exquisite grace (*The Golden Coach*), into a fond and foolish old man.

Yet *Le Petit Théâtre de Jean Renoir* has opened up the old arguments once more. Although the film has on the whole been favourably received by British and American critics, it has also been predictably misunderstood, with the last episode (the most characteristic of the Renoir one loves to love) praised at the expense of the other three. Quite apart from the fact that the film is specifically designed as a whole, so that to praise one episode or another is basically irrelevant, the distinctions made between, say, the sentimental artificiality of the opening sketch and the Impressionist reality of the last, hark back to the misapprehensions which dogged Renoir after his cinema's 'change of life' following *La Règle du Jeu* and his flight to America.

the steamy heat of a baker's shop and the backstage bustle of a theatre. Pragmatically speaking, however, the only choice for Nini is between the life as a housewife offered by her baker's boy, and the life as a star offered by the impresario Danglard; and her only doubt, whether by choosing stardom she will sacrifice love. But the love she dreams of, Renoir suggests, is only a chimera of escape into fairytale romance, and to live her life she must choose either marriage or the theatre. So the prince, with his pledge of undying devotion in a principality whose riches are diamonds and roses, can exist only in a setting as ethereally unreal as he is himself.

On the other hand—and this is the wisdom and poetry of the later Renoir—this declaration of love and its rejection in a setting redolent of studio artificiality at its worst, may be the truest moment of reality in the film, the moment to which Nini will look back all her life as the one in which she failed to realise that there might be something more to life than the marital security she rejects or the fame and fortune she chooses. In his writings and interviews, Renoir has frequently referred to his ambivalent feelings about reality in relation to natural landscapes and studio settings; and in his recently published autobiography,* an invaluable compendium of recollections and reflections, some old and some new

but all phrased with characteristic grace, he resumes his own debate with reference to *Le Petit Théâtre*: 'Whether the setting is natural, or imitates Nature, or is deliberately artificial, is of little importance. I used external truth in so-called "realistic" films like *La Chienne* and *La Bête Humaine*, and apparently total artificiality in films like *La Petite Marchande d'Allumettes* and *Le Carrosse d'Or*. I have spent my life experimenting with different styles, but it all comes down to this: my different attempts to arrive at the inward truth, which for me is the only one that matters.'

The relevance to *Le Petit Théâtre* becomes obvious if one considers the film not only as a whole, but in relation to another of Renoir's preoccupations which hovers throughout the pages of *My Life and My Films*: 'The world has changed for the better and for the worse. One thing is certain, that the calm of evening has vanished from this present world of which the keynote seems to be purposeless agitation.' *Le Petit Théâtre* contemplates, in microcosm, this progress of the modern world from the barbarous simplicity of one in which rich versus poor was the natural order of things, into one which proposes mechanical efficiency and material prosperity for all, before finally acknowledging, by letting the spectators escape back into the fantasy of a past of pure imagination and nostalgia, the uncomfortable truth that in this better if not best of all possible worlds,

**My Life and My Films*. Translated by Norman Denny. Collins, £4.00.

happiness has become something to be manufactured on the assembly line.

Paradoxically, therefore, *Le Roi d'Yvetot*, the last sketch and the only one to be shot in real settings, is also the most artificial. Despite the tangible reality of the little village in the *midi*, where the superbly fleshly old man (a worthy companion to Auguste Renoir's *baigneuses*) picks roses in his luxuriant garden, plays a leisurely game of *pétanque* in the sleepy square, and strolls as much at home along the sun-baked roads as the donkey-carts that seem to defy the automobile to prove it has been invented, the *ménage à trois* solution with which he rises magisterially above the problem posed by a sensual young wife is pure theatrical contrivance, with no truth, psychological or otherwise, except in the never-never land of the imagination where ugly realities like jealousy and desire can be sublimated in the name of an all-embracing love.

The artificiality, that pleasing sleight-of-hand with which memory and imagination can manufacture rose-tinted glasses through which to contemplate life, is stressed not only by the gales of laughter with which the villagers denounce their masquerade as they take a final theatrical bow, but by the fact that Renoir chooses to interpolate the little interlude in which Jeanne Moreau sings 'Quand l'Amour Meurt'—the song Dietrich sang in top hat and tails in *Morocco*—just before it. Presented as a *hommage* to La Belle Epoque—which Renoir says, like any golden age, never really existed—the song also implies that the world of *Le Roi d'Yvetot*, set in our own present, doesn't really exist either, except as an enchanted evocation of the *belles époques* of his childhood celebrated by his father Auguste. It is surely not too fanciful to suggest that in this sort of prologue to the final sketch, Jeanne Moreau's gracefully awkward stance, her slightly off-key rendition, and the hesitant half-smile with which she finishes, are intended as an apologetic hint to the spectator to be on his guard against being taken in by appearances in either of Renoir's versions of La Belle Epoque.

The first two episodes, on the other hand, both distil a perception of reality out of deliberate artificiality. Dedicated to Hans Christian Andersen and consciously harking back to the studio legerdemain of *La Petite Marchande d'Allumettes*, *Le Dernier Réveil* goes out of its way to emphasise the contrivances in its story of a rich man's callous joke involving a tramp standing outside the restaurant where he is dining. As soon as the old tramp receives his Christmas gifts of a caviar dinner, an overcoat and a fur wrap, the lights in the restaurant behind him are magically extinguished and snow begins to blanket the scene in a protective silence; as soon as he and his ancient companion begin to dance in celebration of her fantasy of an elegant past, an obliging backdrop provides the requisite salon, servants, chandeliers and musicians.

Frail and fragile in its fairytale poetry, the illusion of happiness lived by these two old derelicts before they die of cold and starvation in each other's arms on the deserted bank of the Seine is given a sharp edge of truth, not so much by the deliberately melodramatic contrasts between poverty and wealth, as by the cruelty and insensitivity inevitable in a society which accepts such

extremes as the norm. The fact, for instance, that the guilty discomfort caused among Gontran's dinner guests by his little joke—he pays the emaciated old tramp to stand and stare in at the window of the restaurant—is outweighed by one girl's distress over an aching tooth, another's worry over whether Gontran will still go on paying her rent, and the stout gentleman's phlegmatic refusal to let what he can't help disturb his intake of what he can enjoy. Or the fact that all the charity dispensed is occasioned either by drunken euphoria or social embarrassment, and is only proffered (a wealthy reveller offers to grant the tramp any wish, but balks angrily when the latter says he would like him to carry his parcels) when it costs nothing but money which will not be missed.

Never for a moment does the real world intrude; yet like a street ballad, or a novel by Dickens, or indeed a fairytale by Andersen, the sketch confronts us with reality through its poetic apprehension of poverty and despair. The world in which such misery existed may be an amalgam of fantasy and memories of days gone by, yet it has a



'La Cireuse Electrique': tragedy of the housewife (Marguerite Cassan) and her floor polisher.

nightmare truth which reminds one that the past was once the present, and might even yet return. From this echo of the past, *La Cireuse Electrique* translates us into the consumer-society present for a sardonically witty anecdote about a houseproud woman who so falls in love with the mechanical efficiency of her electric floor-polisher that she commits suicide when it's destroyed by her maddened husband.

A fanciful tale, which Renoir again pushes into artificiality by casting it as an opera (the heroine has a wonderfully erotic romantic duet with her polisher), and by featuring as its two main sets an apartment block and a Métro station arbitrarily juxtaposed amid the debris of a building site. Yet it too has its edge of reality—abetted by telling details like the magical appearance of the fairy godfather salesman

to demonstrate the electric polisher because he heard the wish through paper-thin walls from his flat next door—in a society where, to cite only one example, addiction to the motor-car threatens to bring everything to a standstill by jamming streets, killing pedestrians, and making feet obsolescent.

The interesting thing about this sketch, though, is that it plays a dual role in Renoir's scheme of things. With his operatic chorus popping formally up as a rush-hour crowd to celebrate the metronomic regularity of a life spent between the office and the underground, and with his equally formalised insistence on the presence in this mechanised world of a horde of young children and a solitary pair of oblivious lovers, Renoir gives it an indefinable but quite distinct flavour of science fiction which links the episode thematically to *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*. This, he suggests, is the future which (saving, perhaps, the humanising miracle of love and childbirth) inevitably awaits us; and in ending with the ideal world that never was or could be of *Le Roi d'Yvetot*, he allows us—unlike Nini in *French Cancan*—to opt for a delicious fantasy of diamonds and roses.

Even if he hadn't already specifically stated in *My Life and My Films*, referring to a leg wound he sustained during the First World War, that he has made his last film ('I directed films as much with my legs as with my head, and the result of that wound, which never healed, was that four years ago, at the age of seventy-five, I had to abandon a career which, to my mind, was only just beginning'), *Le Petit Théâtre* would have to be read as a moving farewell to the cinema; and perhaps not coincidentally, all its episodes are haunted by intimations of death. Packed with echoes and reminiscences, from the puppet prologue of *La Chienne* to the expressive presence of a picture on a wall in *Boudu*, from the dream world of *La Petite Marchande d'Allumettes* to the Impressionist landscapes of *Partie de Campagne* or *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* and the formally enclosed society of *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (now high-rise rather than a cosily old world *cour*), the film is like an anthology in which Renoir takes stock of his achievements and occasionally, as in the operatic form of *La Cireuse Electrique*, is still busily exploring new methods and forms. It even resumes in its three stories, though with a good deal of overlapping and extrapolation, the central concerns of the three major periods in his career: the 'avant-garde formalism' of his silent days, the social satire of the Thirties, and the quite different, interior formalism of the last films. Above all, in the Jeanne Moreau song which spreads its sadness and infinite regret through the entire film, it speaks volumes about the acceptance with which Renoir has greeted the inevitability of old age and the end of a career which 'was only just beginning':

'Lorsque tout est fini,
Quand se meurt votre beau rêve,
Pourquoi pleurer les jours enfuis?'

Miracles apart, there will never now be another Renoir film. On September 15 1974 he celebrated his eightieth birthday. And if, as he himself ruefully remarks in his autobiography, 'We ancients are held by [youthful colleagues] in an esteem similar to

that accorded by modern artists to the cave drawings of Lascaux,' at least his octogenarian celebrations have been marked, so far, by the unearthing of *Le Petit Théâtre*, various overdue revivals including *Toni*, and the publication in English of *My Life and My Films*. This autobiography, pretty accurately translated (though it misses, much less seriously than the English editions of Renoir, *My Father* and *The Notebooks of Captain George*, Renoir's captivating delicacy as a writer), and much better illustrated than the French edition (though the montage layout does less than justice to the excellent stills and portraits), is after all the next best thing to a new Renoir movie. Effortlessly, Renoir takes us into his private world of friends and memories, and although most of his film-making career has been thoroughly documented in interviews and articles, there are still fresh insights and revelations to be made.

Most fascinating of all, perhaps, is his explanation of what he was trying to do with Catherine Hessling in his silent films, now all too often praised with specific reservations for the intrusive (or worse) element of Hessling's performances:

'I was principally concerned with the pictorial aspect, and in this was well served by Catherine Hessling. Her success would have been dazzling if it had been less of a novelty. The public is scared of novelty. One has to use cunning to induce them to swallow it, disguise it under the semblance of the commonplace. Catherine's acting was a form of mime. She had taken a great many dancing lessons and her body possessed a professional suppleness. With her we had conceived a mode of expressing the emotions which had more to do with dancing than with the cinema. I had got it into my head, and into her head, that since the moving picture depended on the jerks of a Maltese cross it must be played jerkily. I also thought that the photography of French films was too soft. I wanted films based photographically on sharp contrasts. I went so far as to restrict Catherine's make-up to an extremely thick white base, with all the other tints rendered in black, including the pinks and reds. Her mouth and eyes were made completely black. She became a kind of puppet—a puppet of genius, be it said—entirely black and white. I thought: "Since the cinema is black and white, why photograph other colours?"'

Perhaps someone would now issue an English edition of *Ecrits 1926-1971* (Paris: Belfond, 1974). This is a collection of all Renoir's known writings in French, and although it inevitably overlaps here and there with the autobiography, the result is to complement rather than to repeat. Of particular interest—and here reprinted for the first time—is a series of articles Renoir contributed to *Ce Soir* every Wednesday, as a sort of roving gossip columnist, from March 1937 to October 1938.

Covering every subject under the sun, but reverting constantly to quirkish humanity and the darkening face of Fascism in Europe, these articles go a great deal towards explaining the Renoir who was then involved in such political and populist projects as *La Vie est à Nous* and *La Marseillaise*—about which he has always, for obvious witch-hunting reasons, remained rather reticent since settling in America—

and also illustrate the extent to which his growing disillusionment with the French reaction to Fascism consciously underlaid and directed the satire of *La Règle du Jeu*. As one might have expected, he was clearly much less of a political animal than a committed humanist, and these inquisitive, obliquely perceptive anecdotes, like his films, reveal an artist who never tires of examining and wondering at the follies and grandeurs of his fellow creatures.

It is thanks to this sympathy and curiosity that even the most marginal characters in Renoir's films seem to lead a life of their own. Take, for instance, the rosiely buxom maid in *Le Roi d'Yvetot*—beautifully played by Dominique Labourier and one of the most enchantingly Renoiresque characters in *Le Petit Théâtre*—who responds to all questions about life's little problems and disasters (why doesn't she marry the butcher's boy instead of teasing him? Why is the fish served at dinner entirely raw?) by bursting into disarming peals of giggles. Her ambition, touchingly absurd and diligently practised, in a series of extraordinary posturings borrowed from some distant notion of theatrical elegance but liable to founder at a moment's notice into undignified scamperings, is to be a Hetaera (interpreted, evidently, as a cross between a callgirl and a high-class courtesan). What, finally, makes this creature come so vividly alive is that, unknown to herself but revealed to us in her magnificent ability to rise to the occasion when true drama threatens her small world—sinking to her knees to implore her beloved *patron* not to enter the bedroom which will disclose his lady's shame, rushing headlong through the village to claim her lover before Fate strikes—is that she is by nature and by instinct the complete Lady of the Camellias.



'Le Roi d'Yvetot': husband (Fernand Sardou), maid (Dominique Labourier), wife (Françoise Arnoul) and lover (Jean Carmet)

THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE:

Bazin and Truffaut on Renoir

Paul Thomas

It is time to rescue Jean Renoir from the clutches of his greatest admirers. François Truffaut's long awaited edition of the writings of the *éminence grise* of French film criticism, André Bazin, on Renoir* is a sad disappointment. Truffaut's published interviews with Hitchcock in some ways should have warned us what was in store; his

fulsome introduction to this volume is not reassuring. 'No one should expect me to introduce this book with caution, detachment and equanimity,' he writes. 'André Bazin and Jean Renoir have meant too much to me for me to be able to speak of them dispassionately. Thus it is quite natural that I should feel *Jean Renoir* by André Bazin is the best book on the cinema, written by the best critic, about the best director.' The trouble with this exaggerated set of claims is that one would have no way of knowing, from what Bazin is presented as saying in this book, why Renoir should be considered a great director—or, for that matter, why Bazin should be considered a great critic.

Truffaut's collation of Bazin's writings on Renoir (which, here, are sometimes pointed, often occasional) adds up to a hodge-podge badly in need of coherent editing. Bazin constantly contradicts himself, changes his mind, applies different standards at different times; his factual errors about the basics of what happens in Renoir's plots are legion. Worse still, in his uncritical adulation of Bazin, Truffaut does nothing in his capacity as editor to correct Bazin's inaccuracies, or even to indicate what they are, but instead

**Jean Renoir*, by André Bazin. Edited by François Truffaut, translated by W. W. Halsey and W. H. Simon. W. H. Allen, £4.50.

lets every word stand. It is surprising enough that Bazin's powers of recall were less than total; but it is inexcusable that Truffaut, whose memory is clearly much better, should perversely fail to set the record straight.

Renoir's influence on Truffaut as a filmmaker is clear and—to a point—documented; and to the extent that Renoir has influenced Truffaut's films (or anybody else's) we are all the richer. Truffaut often pays homage to Renoir, constructing the courtyard in *Domicile Conjugal*, for example, in such a way that we almost cannot fail to recall *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*. Less obviously, he even pays Renoir the compliment of rerunning his reflexivity. In *L'Enfant Sauvage* Truffaut identifies not with the child, the focus of sympathy, but with the stilted doctor, in much the same way as Renoir had portrayed himself not through Jurieu but as Octave in *La Règle du Jeu*. The child's condemnatory stare into the camera at the end of *L'Enfant Sauvage*—like the freeze-frame that brings *Les Quatre Cents Coups* to its celebrated 'conclusion'—is at the audience; but this time it is through Truffaut himself.

Tout le monde a ses raisons, to be sure. Truffaut at this point, a key point in his career as director, is openly attesting that he has accepted Renoir's humanism, however personal and 'close to the bone' its implications may prove to be. His acceptance of even the condemnatory and reflexive side of Renoir's humanism is honest and in good

faith. The trouble is that it is, precisely, an acceptance, a response; it is arrived at, after due reflection, over the passage of time. Truffaut's humanism is, in other words, necessarily reserved in a sense that Renoir's humanism never had to be. Humanism in Renoir is a starting point, a hypothesis; humanism in Truffaut is a conclusion. Only time will tell whether Truffaut will adhere to it, but the question already can be put. If humanism in Renoir's sense is to have any meaning in Truffaut's films, he will have to adhere to it; Renoir's own films, by contrast, are suffused and illuminated by humanism precisely because he never had to adhere to it in this way at all.

One example of the difference between these two types of humanism should make it clearer. Truffaut usually simply recoils from violence. Even in *The Bride Wore Black* he does not confront it directly. The death sequence in *Jules et Jim* sets the tone; and the tone is unconsciously coy ('Once they are burning books, soon they will be burning people'). Renoir is very different. He is neither fascinated by nor obsessed with violence; yet his 1930s films, so loved by Bazin and Truffaut, deal with it constantly. One need think only of *La Chienne*, *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*, *Toni*, *Les Bas-Fonds*, *La Marseillaise*, *La Grande Illusion*, *La Règle du Jeu*. Truffaut's films echo many of the themes developed in this unparalleled series, but they never face up to death in the same way. The clearest possible example of a violent Renoir sequence that could not

find a place in a Truffaut film, however, is perhaps from *Diary of a Chambermaid*—one of Renoir's much maligned American-period films which (not uncoincidentally) gives Bazin a great deal of trouble. When Captain Mauger breaks the neck of his ferret in front of Célestine, the whole tone of the film changes abruptly, in an instant; the sequence provides one of the most complete reversals of direction (combining the elements of three separate incidents in *La Règle du Jeu*) not only in any Renoir film, but in any film ever made. Small wonder that Renoir felt he had been reborn in America. Today's 'police intellectuals' of the cinema, who are always trying to shock—and presumably to inform—their audience through the judicious use of violence, might learn much from this sequence, the power of which they have never begun to emulate. Renoir alone could structure a whole film around an incident like this.

The point here is not to score cheap points against Truffaut (or anybody else) on the grounds that his acceptance of Renoir's philosophy has so far been intermittent and reserved; this is no more than should be expected. Truffaut's markedly uneven output has characteristics of its own. More to the point is that Truffaut, as critic and editor, is doing less than justice to those he claims to revere. The reason why his attitude of reverential awe for Bazin and Renoir is expressed as a refusal to distance himself from their impact is that Truffaut has a fatal tendency to see Renoir through

Jean Renoir and François Truffaut. Photograph by Nicoletta Zalaffi



Bazin's eyes. He fails to distinguish Renoir from what Bazin says about Renoir. It is not accidental that what emerges from Truffaut's writings about film (but not from his own films) is an overdrawn polarity which recalls a similarly exaggerated contrast found in Bazin. Renoir, Truffaut in effect is telling us, is the embodiment of humanism, while Hitchcock is the embodiment of manipulation. Renoir engages the human sympathies of the audience, while Hitchcock is concerned to manipulate its deepest fears, and here are the two poles between which cinema must necessarily fall. Not only does this position help account for the notorious imperfections in Truffaut's Hitchcock book, in which he goes off, unswervingly, on any available tangent, thwarting and short-circuiting practically everything Hitchcock has to say; it also all too obviously bears the stamp of Bazin.

Bazin's unhappy impact on Truffaut in certain respects outweighs and operates at the expense of the influence, and even the understanding, of Renoir himself. The pity of it is not merely that Truffaut, in his capacity as director, might be said to stand in need of a heavier dose of Renoir (which would be true of most directors); of more immediate importance is the fact that Bazin's unexpected and unwelcome shortcomings as a critic of Renoir have rubbed off on Truffaut himself, in his capacity as critic. These two demerits—if they are demerits—are not unconnected, but the possibility remains open that the real villain in the picture is Bazin himself.

The few pointers Bazin provides in *Jean Renoir* as to why Renoir is a great director whose influence should endure are already familiar from his *Qu'est-ce que le Cinéma?*. They centre upon his sophisticated but ultimately unsatisfying polarisation of realism, which is connected with depth of field, and therefore with Renoir's experiments with deep focus in his 1930s films, against montage. The former, which entails that extension of the visual range within the shot or sequence corresponds to a moral tolerance for characters, actors and audience alike, is reducible to the objectivity of the camera which records. Montage, which interposes the dominating and programmatic presence of the director in a completely different way, is correlated with a tendency to use the *Technik* of cinema in general, and the cutting room in particular, to manipulate characters, actors and audience alike. Montage, then, according to Bazin (and, by implication, to Truffaut as well, who unlike Bazin unthinkingly applies this as a covert remonstrance against Hitchcock), is reducible to the subjectivity of the director, who decides; if realism (to parody the argument) is democratic, montage is dictatorial. Bazin's insistence that film art cannot be reduced to montage may once have provided a salutary corrective to archaic theories that centred upon the inimitable (and never really imitated) work of Eisenstein; but whether this emphasis on the realism involved in depth of field can be made to amount to a substantive theory of what film is all about, is another question again. Bazin's own answer to this question is vitiated by Renoir's practice, although we could hardly expect Bazin or Truffaut to see this.

This requires some explanation. Bazin's schema, as is clear from *Qu'est-ce que le Cinéma?* rather than *Jean Renoir*, is based firmly upon a sophisticated examination of Renoir's films of the Thirties and of the ways in which his technical advances throughout this period are tied to the humanistic themes developed through these films. The corollary of this argument, one which is glaringly apparent in the Truffaut-Bazin book, is that Bazin, faced with Renoir's American films (and, to a lesser extent, his postwar French films), is simply at a loss to account for the reasons why Renoir systematically broke the rules which, according to Bazin, he had painstakingly established for himself. To revert to *Diary of a Chambermaid*, Bazin's successive, inconsistent responses to this strangely complex film, responses which are laid out, *seriatim*, by Truffaut, at least have in common the extraordinary critical lapse of concentrating exclusively upon what happens before Mauger kills his trained ferret. It is as if Bazin, blinded by the 'artificial' Hollywood studio lights, had rushed out of the cinema to read Mirbeau.

Bazin's ill-concealed, puritanical horror at the theatrical glare of the Hollywood lighting—as though Renoir, the archetypal realist, had been forced to sell out to the crassest American commercialism—at the very least should have been tempered by a reminiscence of what happens at the outset of *La Règle du Jeu*; but recall is not Bazin's strong point. Renoir cuts from André Jurieu's landing at a darkened, sombre Le Bourget to the dazzling, translucent light of Christine's dressing room. The transition is as carefully considered as it is dramatic; it is the transition from the sombre world of honesty, which Jurieu inhabits alone, to the glittering world of artifice to which he demands entry and which destroys him. This world of artifice is, of course, the world of Célestine too, and it is astonishing that Bazin fails to see so obvious a connection. Without making this connection, the critic cannot begin to deal with *Diary of a Chambermaid*, which is perhaps why Bazin never does so.

This particular shortcoming in Bazin is not chosen at random, though many others could be; the critical failure of nerve of which it is symptomatic is derived from a basic refusal to take *La Règle du Jeu* as seriously as it demands to be taken. Whether or not it is Renoir's best film, it is the consummation of his films of the 1930s; but one would never guess this from what Bazin is presented as saying about it. There is in this book no real analysis of how this film, or how any Renoir film, works. What Bazin is content to give us is, on the one hand, an attitude of august reverence for the Mozartian complexities and layers of meaning that make up *La Règle du Jeu*, and on the other hand a set of specific points that barely rise above the level of platitude.

What are we to make of so glaringly obvious an observation as the idea that the hunt in the château is 'like' the earlier hunts for the rabbits, in 'the best book on the cinema, written by the best critic'? Others of Bazin's points take us further, but he makes no attempt to tell us where. It is true, for instance, that at the party the guests, by assuming disguises, are revealing themselves as they really are; or that the lens of the

miniature telescope through which Christine observes Robert and Geneviève is described exactly as a film camera might be described. But to do any kind of justice to *La Règle du Jeu* (and by implication to Renoir's entire output) the question of where these examples point must be faced. They point to Renoir himself, Renoir the observer, Renoir the failed manipulator, Octave, the centre of the action who cannot escape the disguise he has assumed without the unwilling help of the other participants of the *comédie*, among whom Renoir's camera circulates like another guest.

To see this is to begin to penetrate, however dimly, the complexities of what might be Renoir's greatest and most self-conscious (literally self-conscious) film. The trouble with Bazin's analyses is that they are too trapped within their categories of 'realism', 'depth of field' and so on to see that Renoir had already, in 1939, broken away from these same categories as he was to break away—for better or for worse—from many others. The fact that Renoir could see beyond the boundaries that Bazin thinks 'define' his 'style' demands an alternative critical approach to the one which Bazin adopted and which strait-jacketed his appreciation of what Renoir was trying to do.

The need for an alternative critical strategy to deal with the difficulties of Renoir is, by default, the central message of the Truffaut-Bazin book; but it is easier said than done. One of the paradoxes of Renoir, that most paradoxical of directors, is that his films have a way of confounding all manner of orthodox critical approaches; this is, in a very real sense, the measure of his genius. *Jean Renoir: The World of his Films*, by Leo Braudy, for instance, works against the simplistic *auteur* approach that would tell us that Renoir's films, taken in sequence, simply go from strength to strength and just keep (or kept) getting better and better. The setbacks and lapses that punctuate Renoir's output lend credence to Braudy's well-grounded objection to this point of view; yet it remains true that Renoir's own work defies even the sympathetic kind of classification that Braudy gives it. Truffaut may have to adhere to Renoir's precepts, but Renoir himself constantly refused to do so. He never had to measure what he was trying to do against these precepts, because his humanism, his cinema, simply is not reducible to any set of precepts at all.

The academic exercise of using themes that are discernible in Renoir's films, over several decades, as yardsticks or criteria for judgment of these films runs up against the obstacles Renoir unfailingly provides. Braudy, who itemises fairly obvious themes—Renoir and nature, Renoir and theatre, Renoir and society, Renoir and heroism—falls foul of Renoir's entire approach to film. His book, which is much more worthy than the Bazin-Truffaut volume for an understanding of Renoir's enterprises, resolves itself into a series of pointers or tips about how to begin to analyse a Renoir film. Braudy's own analysis is thematic, choppy, ahistorical, confusing and invaluable; invaluable because he identifies every single rule of the game that Renoir, somewhere or other, breaks—in full knowledge of what he was doing and why he was doing it. ■

LONDON FESTIVAL 74



'Occasional Work of a Female Slave': Alexandra Kluge

If the London Film Festival is in any sense a litmus test of the year's films, 1974 was by and large a good year for the cinema. It was probably simply fortuitous that, coming at the end of the year, the festival was able to bring together new films by Bresson, Resnais, Franju, Rivette (a double bonus), Jancsó, Olmi and Kluge; but that was the good fortune of this year's festival.

As in the last few years, SIGHT AND SOUND goes to press before the festival, which now takes in over fifty features in almost three weeks, is halfway over. Some of the films still to be seen, as well as some of those already seen, have been noted in reports from other festivals: among them Olmi's *The Circumstance* (also, incidentally, shown on BBC television shortly before the festival began), Szabó's *25 Fireman's Street*, Pialat's *La Gueule Ouverte*, Daniel Schmid's *La Paloma*, Thomas Koerfer's *Death of the Flea Circus Director*, the Greek *The Engagement of Anna* and the Iranian *Still Life*. Other films, like Peter Hall's *Akenfield* and Terrence Malick's *Badlands*, are due to open in London shortly and are included in our review section. (It is worth noting here the difference between London, where distributors are still willing to take a risk with a film as 'difficult' as Rivette's *Céline et Julie*, and New York, where only a very few of the 1974 festival films seem to have attracted a distributor.) And a number of this year's major films—Bresson's *Lancelot*, the two new Rivette films, Carlos Saura's

La Prima Angélica and Peter Smith's *A Private Enterprise*—have already been extensively discussed in SIGHT AND SOUND.

Nevertheless, the festival's timing inevitably makes our coverage less than comprehensive. In particular, there are some films we have missed, like the Taviani brothers' *Allonsanfan* and Mimmo Rafele's *Tomorrow*, which advance reports suggest we might have wanted to write about. There have also been disappointments, as there are bound to be with so many films and so inevitably eclectic a selection.

There is no doubt, though, that this has been a good festival. If there is a general impression to be had at this stage, it is (encouragingly) that new directors seem less anxious than they were to assimilate other people's influences at the expense of their own films' content; and that 1974 has been an exceptional year for established directors, at a time when some of them (Resnais, Bresson, Rivette) were beginning to find financial, if not critical, support elusive.

OCCASIONAL WORK OF A FEMALE SLAVE

'Roswitha feels an enormous power within her,' Alexander Kluge remarks offscreen at the outset of his latest feature, 'and cinema teaches her that this power exists.' The task of making the invisible visible is essentially the project of a director more concerned with social and political history than with film history, who seems to regard his work as a translation of ideas into sounds and images rather than the other way round. What matters is what the words and images 'say' and imply, in relation to each other—not their independent formal qualities, but their capacity to modify and explicate a complex experience.

What *do* Kluge's opening words say and imply? That film is a means of translating potentiality into actuality, feeling into thought, experience into understanding—the very problem that Roswitha Bronski (Alexandra Kluge, the director's sister) is struggling to cope with over the film's duration. A 29-year-old Frankfurt housewife, she supports her children and husband Franz (a research chemist) by performing abortions, until a series of mishaps—an unsuccessful operation, a rival abortionist reporting her activities to the police—propels her into a life of political activism. Ostensibly reciting her lines as quotations in the Brechtian manner, she embarks on a semi-comic and quixotic quest to translate thoughts into actions while attempting to reconcile the separate compartments of her life. Generally as well as specifically, this leads to contradictions and collisions between society's and the family's separate modes of production, and an exposition of the options of an individual or the lack of them within each structure.

To sustain her family, she obliterates the possibility of other families by removing fetuses from pregnant women; memorising a song by Brecht with the help of her friend Sylvia, she inevitably changes its functions and meanings. After Franz assumes the role of family breadwinner by going to work at the Beauchamp chemical factory, she and Sylvia try to express their outrage about workers' conditions to a newspaper editor; unable to translate their concerns into the rhetoric of headlines, they come across as rather naïve children—the same way Roswitha is regarded at home by Franz.

Persisting, she protests about the sausages served in the factory cafeteria because they give the workers stomach ulcers. Later, she investigates the company's secret plans to close the plant and transfer operations to Portugal—even to the point of driving there, where she can see the new headquarters with her own eyes. But complications keep transforming our perspectives: the trip to Portugal accomplishes nothing (the management decides against the move independently of her actions); her political work isolates her further from Franz—who doesn't know about it, and eventually loses his job as a direct consequence of her agitation. By the end of the film, her intricate cross-purposes have reached the point where she's disseminating ulcers along with political statements to Beauchamp factory workers by wrapping her tracts around sausages, which she peddles from a vendor in steely defiance.

It is worth noting that Kluge's efforts at lucidity parallel Roswitha's every step of the way. But his intelligence figures in the film as a *process* rather than as an object of spectacle ('Find a place in the sun?' asks one title. 'Not easy, because once you've found it, the sun has set'), and 'truth' becomes a quest for meaning through diverse, divergent and even antithetical conditions rather than a concise set of conclusions or slogans.

Yet Kluge persuades us that this absurd terrain is precisely the one where politics happen. The apparent resemblance of his methods to Godard's has frequently been noted; what remains interesting about it is how starkly it delineates the respective strengths and limitations of each in relation to art and politics. In *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her*, Godard's romantic, idealist politics generally involve seeing high-rise apartment complexes from above, magically, and drive him to create a new language that ultimately overtakes his political point of departure—a housewife who lives in one of these complexes. 'Language is the house that man lives in,' she notes quite early in the film, and here as in *La Chinoise* an indelible purity of sound and image conspire to house a utopian vision. Kluge's materialist grasp of politics involves seeing these buildings from below—the viewpoint of the worker, not the visionary—and adopting and adapting an available language (principally Godard's) to pursue his meanings. Sounds and images become message-carriers rather than objects for contemplation, engendering a cognitive process which proceeds far beyond their appearances.

If we remember some of Kluge's images, this is more because of their relation to other images and the ideas behind them than any other expressive capacities. The abortion sequence which occurs only a few minutes into the film is unforgettable, but its impact is ensured by Kluge's manner of anticipating and reinforcing it. Outside the clinic, the camera moves up to a row of lighted windows behind a network of tree branches, and a drawing of curtains further suggests the Hollywood convention of dealing with a taboo from a comfortable distance; when we instantly cut to hands, surgical instruments and then the operation itself, the shock is as salutary as that of the shower murder in *Psycho*. Later, after Roswitha and Franz buy one another comically inappropriate gifts—a fishing rod and a gold wristwatch—she accidentally drops the latter down a sink drain, and furtively tries to retrieve it. In one bold stroke, the abortion is recalled, with its sense of a lost possession (the foetus itself also winds up in a sink, under a clutter of instruments); 'fishing' for the watch brings to mind her equally gratuitous gift to Franz; and her concealment of the loss from him echoes her previous withholding of details about her abortionist career.

Kluge's focus throughout is largely on these 'invisible' interrelations: a torch functions successively as an aid to Roswitha in repairing her car, a tool for smashing the body of another, and a trap when she emerges from a clandestine search through the factory to encounter the night watchman. Initially, her family is made visible through its presence; subsequently, its importance

is registered through its absence: Roswitha deciding that 'her family can't live without her' en route to Portugal, or collecting her children's toys when she arrives home late at night.

'Give me a foothold outside the family,' says one title, 'and I'll lift the world.' Combining Archimedes' definition of 'work' with an understanding of Marx and Engels, Kluge fuses physics, an observation on the nature of labour and a grasp of social forms in one elegant formula. Another quote, from Engels: 'All families in capitalist society are modelled on the bourgeois prototype. This model is obsolete.' Abortions simultaneously preserve and threaten the bourgeois family, but are carefully kept in a separate sphere; when Roswitha is expelled from this sphere, she becomes obsolete and 'invisible'—which drives her straight into politics. Yet for all the apparent futility of her attempts to tie the dangling threads of her life into a practical knot—a problem that Kluge is much too wise to propose utopian solutions for—the increase in awareness is unquestionably a step forward in political consciousness. We sense an enormous power within Roswitha and her persistent aspirations; Kluge's cinema teaches us that this power exists.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM, YEHUDA SAFRAN

ROME WANTS ANOTHER CAESAR

In the ten features he has made since *Cantata* in 1962, Miklós Jancsó has developed a film form and a series of dramatic and visual codes that enable him to deal with ideologies as concrete facts; in effect, an extension into politics of Antonioni's towns and landscapes of the bourgeois 'soul'. Each Jancsó film both draws on and redefines the codes, but none more strikingly than *Roma Rivule Cesare*; after the seeming opaqueness of *Agnus Dei* and *Red Psalm*, its exceptional lucidity suggests that Jancsó intended its function to be twofold. Even while it begins an investigation of Roman history in the terms that Jancsó has already used to broach Hungarian history of the last century, it also consolidates all the gains in his recent, most 'experimental' films. The result is of the first interest and importance, and the following notes can offer no more than a cursory glance at its most crucial features.

Substance. Roman colonisers are draining Numidia of all its natural wealth. A group of dissident Roman patricians—among them Claudius (Daniel Olbrychsky) and Octavian (Hiram Keller)—band with the Numidian resistance to assassinate the proconsul Titus Sextius, but are tricked into killing his twin. They are discussing tactics when they hear of Julius Caesar's assassination. With the colony in turmoil, they jubilantly elect Claudius provisional governor, and imprison Sextius. But then a Roman consul arrives to summon Octavian to Rome, where he has been nominated successor to Caesar. After much youthful hesitation, Octavian accepts the mantle, a decision that provokes a rupture in his friendship with Claudius, who dreams of a world without Caesars. Claudius kills himself, and Octavian leaves for Rome. Their debates and actions are set against the mysterious

culture of the Numidians themselves, notably represented by Juba, leader of the resistance, Blue Tunic, commander of the Romans' Numidian legion, and the unnamed magician/sage whose dance has the power to restore life to the dead.

Lucidity. 'A film about the past which is lucid can help people of the present to achieve that necessary lucidity.' The words are Straub's, but might as easily be Jancsó's; indeed, after his devious struggle in *The Pacifist* to represent the more anarchic strain in contemporary European ideology, one suspects that Jancsó might readily admit to sharing Straub's declared reluctance to tackle issues of the moment (*à la* Godard) and preference for subjects more amenable to dispassionate analysis. His strategy in representing a historical past, though, owes more to the Pasolini of the *Gospel* or *Oedipus* than to Straub: Jancsó, too, conjures together present actualities (landscapes, ruins, 'primitive' peoples), elements of folklore, myth and anthropology, and carefully determined period details to produce a vision of the past that exists nowhere but in the present.

Roma Rivule Cesare uses exactly such frank artifice in the service of a narrative that is at once a theoretical reflection on revolution and power structures and a historical precedent for many urgently topical crises in the 'Third World'. For once, Jancsó is as generous with dialogue as with imagery, and the roles and motivations of his protagonists are never in doubt. Juba, for instance, sets the Roman dissidents' position in perspective from the start when he warns Claudius: 'You are not here to help us but to instigate us; your hatred is something personal.' He is equally aware of the Numidian position: 'We poor people survive thanks to our tradition and our incomprehensible rites.' Before he takes his own life, Claudius articulates his own role in another way: 'I must be in opposition all the time.' This brilliant clarity has the retrospective effect of illuminating the darker corners of a film like *Agnus Dei*.

Form. Jancsó's long, fluid takes and reduction of editing to the barest minimum superficially offer the kind of cinema that Bazin sought to isolate in Rossellini's early work. Jancsó's interest, however, is not so much in preserving the continuities of the natural world as a primary level of denotation in the film as in allowing the dialectic process of an action or discussion to retain a fluency that he feels to be organic. As in several recent films, Jancsó uses smoke-screens as an integral visual element; it becomes clear that their importance is more formal than thematic. He uses smoke just as he uses complex tracking shots, to make the physical space between his protagonists almost palpable—that is, as concrete as anything else in the film.

Codes. The nature and degree of Jancsó's stylisation in *Roma Rivule Cesare* could be summarised by instancing his 'translation' of Rome's imperial purple into a pastel violet. Clothing, and the acts of dressing or undressing, have their customary emphasis in Jancsó's schema: Sextius' twin shrouds himself in his robe of office to await his execution, Blue Tunic is stripped and 'purged' in water when he confesses past duplicity, the magician strips to perform

his 'incomprehensible rites', Octavian initially refuses Caesar's robe and finally uses it and his laurel crown to cover Claudius' corpse. The code also yields the notion of disguise (Claudius dresses as Blue Tunic to attack Sextius), which connects with the array of traitors, opposites and doubles indispensable to Jancsó's exposition of the nature of a dialectic process. Claudius and Octavian are precise opposites (fair/dark, tall/short, bold/shy, etc.), which necessarily makes their relationship the more symbiotic. Music is similarly codified: the Roman rebels and their native allies meet imperial drums with drums of their own, but both are underpinned by the delicate, hypnotic tones of the harp plucked by the magician, beckoning towards the irrational forces he represents. Elsewhere, the imagery ranges from iconology (the ubiquitous statues of Caesar) to symbolism (a sack of grain that is 'stabbed' to bring forth its 'life').

Polemics. Sextius' wife accuses Claudius of creating 'an atmosphere of fear' through his martial manner and trappings; he later avers that 'ideas do not have swords.' At the end of his film, as the camera pans away from Claudius' body to a palm tree, Jancsó offers an honourable, polemical answer to the riddle. 'Virtue,' he says, 'depends on the interpretation of a given moment.' Claudius' challenge represents an eternal opposition to any *status quo*; as long as it is admitted into the reckoning, in all its volatile energy, it will be possible to interpret given moments. *Roma Rivuole Cesare* is rich in such possibilities.

TONY RAYNS

L'HOMME SANS VISAGE

With Gayle Hunnicutt stealthily silhouetted among the moonlit chimneystacks, Musidora's hooded *collant noir* replaced by an elegant trouser suit and a black half-mask that accentuates the feline menace by letting her auburn mane shimmer unnervingly in the shadows, it is almost like old times in Feuillade's phantom Paris. But not quite. As she peers in at a skylight, desperately seeking refuge from pursuing police, we are shown a scene of preternatural helplessness and innocence: a little old lady in bed who has fallen asleep over a book, and who wakes to gaze at the monstrous shape lurking outside in the darkness for a moment of wonderment which barely has time to develop into terror before it is snuffed out by the intruder's dagger. The shock of her death, totally unprepared for by the muzak angelic choir which bathes the sequence with its lullaby, and indicating the presence of a razor blade or two amid the otherwise familiar fantasy of the film's path—it is rather as though Red Riding Hood's grandmother were disposed of not as a formal prelude to the tale but with a flourish of blood and snapping teeth—is absolutely central to Georges Franju's conception.

Musidora, of course, committed many a *crime sanglant*, but like those of Francine Bergé in Franju's own *Judex*, they were integral to the arch-criminal's ruthless quest for power. Here the fantasy of the plot spills over, not exactly into reality, but into a real world which is no part of fantasy's domain and which is glimpsed once again



'L'Homme sans Visage': the Templar meeting in an underground cavern

with the murder of the little man (Raymond Bussières) who is entrusted with the fake seals—supposedly a key to the mysterious treasure of the Templars—which the police have prepared as a trap for the Man without a Face (Jacques Champreux). We know the little man to be a police agent, and therefore no helpless victim like the old lady, yet Franju forges an unmistakable link between the two with a scene, quite irrelevant to the action, in which we watch the man live a *temps mort* before the departure of the train in which he is doomed to die. Casually, an impatient traveller rather than a man aware that he may be risking his life as a decoy, he settles in to his seat, glances out of the window, looks at his watch, and unfolds a newspaper. It is the pointed absence of any element of the fantastic that makes the scene so oddly moving: somehow, miraculously, as he opens his copy of *Le Monde*—there are other newspapers in the film, invariably conjured by crimes and sensations—we are transported momentarily into a world where the Man without a Face and his machinations have no business to be.

Normally, Franju's films are concerned to uncover the reality in fantasy (or *vice versa*), whether he starts from the twin masquerades of Thomas and the Princesse de Bormes to end in the desolation of the battlefield in *Thomas l'Imposteur*, or from the unremarkable fact of an automobile accident to arrive at enveloping madness in *Les Yeux sans Visage*. Even *Judex* kept one foot firmly anchored in reality through the presence of the natural (or possibly supernatural) world as guardians of innocence. But where Franju, in assigning this very special role to the dogs and birds in *Judex*, had to leave a good deal of the Souvestre-Allain plot to take care of itself while he pursued his own distinctive brand of poetry, in *L'Homme sans Visage* he plays the game without reserve, stripping away the poetic *grisaille* with which Feuillade distanced his villains and their villainies, and

rediscovering underneath the sharply focused, unrepentantly gleeful, penny dreadful atrocities of Souvestre and Allain.

The result, two superb Feuillade shots notwithstanding—the Man without a Face's lair, in a delightfully dilapidated shop called 'Au Bonheur des Dames', and the surrounding wasteland of weeds and crumbling houses into which he disappears at the end, might have stepped straight out of *Les Vampires*—is much closer to Lang than to Feuillade. From the opening scene, superbly precise yet reverberatingly grandiose in the way it sweeps a Templar cross, a huge silvered mask and a secret passageway up into an intimation of Wagnerian subterranean rumblings, we are in the grip not of quaintly courteous Feuillade villains, but of Langian supermen. Not that the Man without a Face's immediate concerns reveal a megalomania to match Mabuse's (in fact he shows singularly little enthusiasm for his mad doctor friend's plan to mass-produce human robot killers by surgical appropriation of their brains). Yet the hint is there; both more and less strictly pragmatic than the fiendish Mabuse (where Mabuse was content to amass his fortune by gambling, he is after no less than the fabled treasure of the Templars), the Man without a Face reveals himself to us for the first time by donning his crimson mask before a mirror and suddenly throwing out his black-gloved hand in a gesture of rapacity which can have no less than the world as its object.

It goes almost without saying that Franju handles the traditional elements of the serial with an impeccable visual flair (the marvellous Templar meeting in an underground cavern with the white-robed initiates picked out of the darkness as they group round a huge white cross), a keen sense of the absurd (a roomful of subordinate villains solemnly sitting at typewriters and performing clerical duties dressed top to toe in black tights), and a superb deployment of plot-hooks (one really is on edge



'The Terminal Man': George Segal

to discover what happens next). If the film strikes deeper it is because Franju also gives it a system of *correspondances* which work subliminally to send the spectator's emotions scurrying in contrary directions. When the Man without a Face materialises in the Grand Master's sanctum for a spot of torture climaxed by murder, he is seen against a red curtain; echoing the colour of his mask, this red makes several subsequent reappearances, most notably as a warning splash behind the Grand Master's nephew as he concocts a disastrous plan to trap the villain, and in a totally opposing role when red later turns out to be the countersign which neutralises the doctor's zombie army.

Supported by subtle dissonances—the sound of children's laughter outside the sinister lair, the background score persistently countering the mood of a scene—these correspondences eventually merge to suggest the cannibalisation of humanity by a new breed of phantom automata. The theme is first hinted at when Franju cuts from a shot of a faceless wig-maker's dummy (as the Man without a Face prepares his first appearance) to the mad doctor's glazed face as he performs (out of frame) a brain operation, and back again to the Man without a Face, now revealed in the crimson mask with eyes apparently burning from a fleshless skull; it is continued in the scene where the Man without a Face sends two of the doctor's zombies to despatch a victim, and as he intones 'This is your man', we see a disembodied black-gloved finger point to a projected *photograph* of the victim; and it is completed by the insistent emphasis on eyes as the bumbling old archaeologist, Professor Petrie, agrees to join the forces of good only because of the heroine's flattering blandishments, and subsequently signs his own death warrant by seeking to publicise his role in tricking the villain. He dies, naturally: poor, frail, self-seeking humanity stands no chance in this war with pure will. And the indefinable unease, the *angoisse* one half-experiences while revelling

in all the absurdly extravagant fun, is pinpointed precisely by those two tiny, transient interruptions of reality.

TOM MILNE

THE TERMINAL MAN

In 1969 the first hapless chimpanzee was directly linked by radio to a computer which took over the functioning of its brain. In 1971, according to Michael Crichton, the first human could have been similarly implanted, and with his novel *The Terminal Man* he set out to demonstrate the method and the possible consequences of placing the brain under artificial control. Crichton's case is so plausible it sounds like yesterday's news—more of a post-mortem than a warning (if warning it is; there is a characteristic ambivalence here). A patient is fitted with a tiny computer connected to wires inserted in the brain, intended to nullify the homicidal effects of brain damage; but his brain finds the computer's signals so pleasant that he is soon stimulated into a state of perpetual violence. He wanders the city in this malfunctioning condition, somewhat to the detriment of friends and acquaintances, until cured like so many renegades by a gunshot or two. One recalls that in *The Andromeda Strain* and in *Westworld*, Crichton went sailing off into melodrama for the concluding scenes.

The film of *Terminal Man*, adapted and directed with admirable assurance by Mike Hodges (who made *Get Carter* and *Pulp*), is faithful to both the best and the worst of Crichton. With the spectacular assistance of Richard Kline's photography, Hodges creates a mood of precarious efficiency that exactly catches the Crichton tone. In their crystal labyrinth of screens, monitors and mirrors, his hospital characters tremble with the unrecognised expectation of failure, checking print-outs like horoscopes before daring to operate. Their maverick victim

is one of the four million Americans still behaving irrationally in a society where computerisation toils for order and method. Man is not, Crichton would remind us (like Asimov and Clarke and, dare one say, Mary Shelley before him), an exclusively rational creature; to ignore his innate perversity is to increase the chances of breakdown. Hodges picks up Crichton's cues and improvises superbly: as orderlies snigger coarsely in the corners in the tradition of Frankenstein's imbecilic assistants, the brain surgeons posture with fragile arrogance, vomiting with terror before the operation, smug at its apparent success, and stunned when it goes wrong.

On one level, *Terminal Man* is about vanity, its causes and its consequences. On the surface, most obviously, it's about light and dark, a formal counterbalance used by Hodges in a sometimes effective, sometimes pretentious manner. For the opening shot, a helicopter rises slowly through darkness until its spotlight dazzles the camera lens; George Segal, bound for computerised zombiehood, is wheeled from the night into the false daylight of the hospital, eventually to be swallowed again by darkness as the camera pans down the walls of his grave. Hodges constantly poses white figures against black, or stands them awkwardly among blocks of monochrome furniture, incompatible with physical or mental comfort; the listless party sequence and the frankly unbelievable environment of the psychiatrist's home are settings that reinforce the sense that man is gradually programming himself to extinction.

At times like the splendid tracking shot across row after row of desk screens on which Segal is describing his fears of mechanical superiority, Hodges is impressively precise in style. Elsewhere, as in the big murder scene, he simply seems to have tried too hard: a parrot trembles in its cage, an extract from *Them* whistles suspensefully on the television set, a girl paints her fingernails black, and the killer's eyes snap open. We are in for high-gloss mayhem—all splashing blood and punctured water-bed and fluttering rose-petals. In slow-motion, accompanied by Bach, and rounded off by close-ups of the formal patterns of flowing liquid, the sequence ends in a kind of vulgarised beauty.

Even at its worst—in the crude suspense of a fist breaking through a locked door or the colourful but idiotic scenes at the cemetery—*Terminal Man* certainly makes good watching. And if George Segal has little opportunity to do more than roll his eyes and intensify his air of dejected pre-occupation, it's pleasing to see Joan Hackett again, coping in wistful horror with a world of wisecracking chauvinist surgeons and suicidal patients. That Hodges (not Crichton) gives her a quote from *The Wasteland* and plants her cowering in the bathroom as the killer pounds up the stairs, seems an act of fate rather than of misjudgment; she has the exact vulnerability for either extreme. We could have done with the likes of her in *Westworld* (which Crichton wrote almost simultaneously with *Terminal Man*), and the likes of Hodges too, for that matter. The story of a robotic monster bent on vengeance, however, could perhaps be allowed to rest now for a year or so.

PHILIP STRICK

IN THE PICTURE

Box Office

For the first time in twenty years, cinema attendances in Britain seem to be taking a turn for the better. Not, as yet, to any very significant or consistent effect: a 4.25 per cent increase for the first six months of 1974 fell back to only one per cent in July 1974, the latest month for which figures are available. But if Britain follows the United States, as it usually does, the trend must certainly be upwards. In America, business is actually reckoned to be as much as 20 to 25 per cent up.

The long slide in attendance figures in Britain has of course been progressive and constant. In 1954, 1275.8m cinema tickets were sold. By 1959 it was down to 580.9m—a drop of well over fifty per cent in only five years. By 1969 the attendance figure was 214.9m; and by 1973 it had fallen away to 142.2m. In other words, it would take a fifty per cent increase on 1973 figures to bring things back even to the 1969 level.

Still, a small start appears to have been made, attributable some would suggest as much to more sensible planning of city cinemas as to a run of more commercially attractive films. But according to Mr. Hugh Orr, president of the Association of Independent Cinemas, 'the national figure disguises the fact that city centres are doing very well at the expense of other important cinemas outside the area.' AIC figures suggest that what in fact happened during April-June 1974 was an attendance increase of almost nine per cent in central areas, and a further 17 per cent decrease in rural and local cinemas. And, of course, in some areas of major cinema closures, it would be hard for people to start going to the movies again even if they wanted to.

There is also plenty of evidence that a few films are doing very well, while a good many others are bumping along on hazardingly

low takings. Early in November, *Cinema TV Today's* figures put *The Odessa File* squarely at the top in the West End, trailed by *Emmanuelle*, *That's Entertainment*, *Juggernaut*, *The Night Porter*, *Chinatown* and *Stardust*. No surprises in that list, which probably sums up fairly well the range and kind of pictures—thrills, disasters, nostalgia and sex—which currently draw the crowds. It may be worth noting that the notorious *Emmanuelle*, at the 630-seater Prince Charles, racked up a bigger take in its first three weeks than *That's Entertainment*, showing simultaneously at the 1,645-seater Dominion and backed by star power, sympathetic reviews, and some old-fashioned drum-beating for big studio pretensions ('Do it

big; do it right; give it class').

One of the gloomier explanations for the box-office upswing is that it's simply to be taken as another sign of the times—the old notion that it takes depression, war or at least severe hardship to get people back to the cinema. 'Television brings the crisis into the home every night,' says Lou Wasserman, president of MCA. 'Movies do not.' The movies, of course, are actively engaged on their own formula for meeting the occasion: all the coming 'disaster' pictures, including *Earthquake* with the new 'Sensurround' system designed to suggest that the spectators themselves are shaking in their seats. This could turn out to be a little too close to the truth.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

Hungarian Notes

The great moment, Hungarian film people are inclined to mourn, is over—the era that began around 1963-64 with the reorganisation of the film industry and of the Academy of Film and Dramatic Art, with the full flowering of the Béla Balázs studio, with Jancsó's *Cantata*, Kovács' *Difficult People* and the first works of Szabó, Gaál, Kardos, Rózsa, Kósa, Gyöngyössi. In the decade since, television has taken its toll, reducing the Hungarian cinema audience from 147 million in 1963 to 70 million ten years later, and reducing the public for Hungarian films still more dramatically, perhaps by two-thirds. The area of art production deliberately fostered by the Hungarian film organisation remains strictly for export and the minority audience at home. The general public has quite firmly declared its box-office preference for *The Csardas Queen* or *The Girl Who Liked Purple Flowers*—the second a

reassuringly old-fashioned commercial picture which was the one-film comeback to his native country of István Székely, the major Hungarian talent of the 1930s, who had spent the intervening years in Hollywood.

Practically no one seems to like the two-studio structure, which was introduced a couple of years ago, as much as the old 1963 system of four creative groups, which the directors and writers found gave stimulating opportunities for the cross-fertilisation of ideas. Then again, however unconsciously, Jancsó had come to be a kind of figurehead of the new cinema; and his prolonged sojourns in Rome affect morale, however indirectly. Certainly most people were positively cheered that he had come back to make *Elektra*, his first Hungarian film since 1971 and *Red Psalm*, and encouraged that it has proved a dazzling return to form after his Italian essays.

The industry maintained a production of twenty feature films in 1973 and will probably have equalled that in 1974. Rather more than half of these come into the 'art' category; and all the major talents (with the exception of Gaál, who has not found a suitable subject since *Dead Area*) have produced new works. Of the older school, Zoltán Fábri has just completed an adaptation of Tibor Déry's panorama of Thirties Hungary, *Unfinished Sentence*. András Kovács seems to have abandoned for the moment his experiment with 'discussion' films, to return to a more conventional narrative style with *Blindfold*, relating an incident in the Second World War and the conflicts within a young chaplain, called upon to testify to a 'miracle' promoted for the sake of morale.

István Szabó's brilliant kaleidoscope of the Hungarian historical

Elliott Gould and Joe Bova in Jack Gold's 'Who?', a spy thriller about an American physicist who has been transformed by surgery into a metal man





Siddhartha Chatterji and Soumitra Chatterji in Satyajit Ray's adventure story 'The Golden Fortress'

experience, as reflected in the collective subconsciousness of the residents of an apartment house on the eve of its demolition, 25 *Fireman Street*, has already been reviewed from the film festivals, and seen at the London Festival. Another London Festival entry was Ferenc Kósa's *Beyond Time*, a complex relation of attitudes within a prison in the 1920s. Since this film Kósa has completed *Snowfall*—a peculiarly thin film of effects, which seem mostly due to the great cameraman Sándor Sára (who is himself now shooting his second feature film).

Imre Gyöngyössi's *Stag Boys* is an extravagant exercise in poetic mysticism in the authentic line of *Palm Sunday* and *Legend about the Death and Resurrection of Two Young Men*. Károly Makk, having signally failed to repeat the success of *Love with the Cannes showing of Catsplay*, adapted from a popular Hungarian theatre piece, has spent the months since May in extensive re-editing. Judit Elek (*Lady from Constantinople*) has made a two-part reportage for television on *A Hungarian Village*, which is a terrible revelation of the spiritual poverty exposed in the rift between generations in a remote rural area.

There are lighter-hearted works as well among the recent films. Elek's husband Zolt Kézdi-Kovács has adapted a children's story by Iván Mandy, about a small boy's disillusionment with his school hero. Mandy also provides the material for Pál Sándor's pastiche of silent slapstick, *Football of the Good Old Days*, which wears a little thin at feature length. Ferenc Rózsai's *Dreaming Youth* is a gentle, charming, free variation on some childhood recollections of Béla Balázs.

The single significant début of the past year has been that of Gyula Maár, a former critic and writer and the husband of the actress Mária Töröcsik. *At the End of the Road*, a portrait of a

socialist pioneer of '48 who finds himself passed by time, has depths of criticism and irony which do not at once appear on the surface, and the film earned itself the main prize at the Mannheim Festival.

DAVID ROBINSON

Petrodollar Epic

The camel train glides majestically across the dunes and a figure in black, the only man on horseback, waves slowly in the direction of a second caravan coming towards a geometric meeting point over the next ridge. On camera A, they are tiny specks in the void of the desert. In the telephoto lens on camera B, the figure on horseback, under turban and black veil, is Anthony Quinn.

The re-enactment of the Flight to Medina is a scene that is sacred to one-fifth of humanity, the low point 1,353 years ago of Mohammed's struggle to establish Islam. It is also Scene E 119 of *Mohammed, the Messenger of God*, a ten million dollar retelling of the life of the Prophet, and the only movie shooting today with a cast of thousands. It is the first petrodollar epic, and like Mohammed it has had to flee opposition in one Moslem country to find support in another. 'As you know, it is an affront to Moslems to depict the likeness of Mohammed,' says Moustapha Akkad, the Syrian-born Hollywood producer-director. 'We never show the Prophet, of course, but there are people who fear a kind of Islamic *Jesus Christ Superstar* and people who feel that any movie on the Prophet is sacrilegious.' We are on location on the edge of the Libyan desert. In a dry riverbed the polyglot crew is preparing Scene A 119, the Flight to Medina shot, this time with Abdullah Gaith, an Egyptian actor, taking Quinn's place on the horse. The film is shot twice, in

English and Arabic, with two sets of actors in all the 30-odd speaking parts.

While Akkad films A 119, we talk with Quinn and Johnny Sekka, who with Irene Papas star in the heathen, or English-language version. As Hamza, Quinn is Mohammed's nephew and powerful defender. What intrigues him in *Mohammed*, he says, is the abstraction of religion, the fact that the film's principal character can never be shown or heard. 'What size do you play to him?' asks Quinn. 'I mean, do you look straight, eye to eye so to speak, or do you look up when you speak to him?' Akkad has solved part of the problem by having a tiny light bulb on the Panavision camera just above the lens. In all scenes where characters and crowds act or react to the Prophet, the 6-watt bulb is Mohammed's immanence.

Mohammed is not short of enemies. Bankrolled with Moroccan, Kuwaiti and Libyan funds through a Lebanese-based firm called Filmco, which plans to follow up with other 'internationally oriented films', the movie began shooting near Marrakesh last April. It was halted in August following pressure from Islamic religious leaders, despite the company's efforts to keep the lowest possible profile. Saudi Arabia's King Faisal, whose realm includes Mecca, was the film's chief opponent. Retaining cast and crew (the latter largely British), Akkad managed to bring Colonel Gaddafi behind the project by screening several hours of unedited film for the Libyan leader. Gaddafi invited Filmco to finish the filming in Libya, despite opposition from his own religious hierarchy. A week before filming resumed, the Grand Mufti of Libya said Islam was in no need of an 'infidel' like Anthony Quinn to make a film of the story which is sacred to nearly 600 million

people. Two days later Gaddafi told Akkad to answer the Mufti on Libyan television.

Akkad, a UCLA film school graduate (and classmate of Francis Ford Coppola), will be filming until March. For his directing debut he is surrounded by top technicians. Andrew Marton, who did the chariot races in *Ben Hur* and the battle sequences in *The Longest Day*, is staging the battle of Uhud. The screenplay is by H. A. L. Craig, an Irish Catholic who wrote *Waterloo* and *Airport 75*. Every line of the script was approved by a leading Muslim scholar at Cairo's Al Azzar university. The Arabic version is being shot in classical language, and will run three hours. Neither version shows Mohammed's seven wives, or his daughters or even their husbands: all too sacred.

Akkad has not yet tackled international distribution, although during the hiatus between Morocco and Libya he was in Hollywood talking to Columbia. He and his oil backers are in no hurry. If need be, he grins, they can buy Radio City Music Hall to premiere their film. After *Mohammed* Akkad would like to do a lightweight romantic story, but Colonel Gaddafi would prefer him to film the story of Libya's national hero, Omar Mukhtar, who would have won his guerrilla war against the Italians in 1942 if he hadn't lost his glasses in the middle of the battle. Meanwhile, the siren of petrodollars is swaying others. Several Hollywood producers are making overtures to the world's new rich, and Elmo Williams has managed to persuade the Shah of Iran to invest in the movies.

AXEL MADSEN

Amateur Night

Somewhere between the short film industry and underground cinema lies the hermetic world of the amateur moviemakers. Despite their exuberance and high productivity they are scorned by the rest of the film business, who allow them out only on certain nights. The most important of these is the September presentation of ten of the year's best amateur films, as chosen by the magazine *Movie Maker*. For some years this has taken place at the National Film Theatre, and the evening is in every respect a scaled down 'glittering event'. The audience includes amateur movie makers who have flown in from all parts of the world; at the champagne reception before the screenings, everybody knows and talks about everybody else and worries about the competition. The atmosphere is identical to that of adjudication night at a provincial amateur drama festival. Perhaps it is this unseasoned enthusiasm that deters the pros. At any rate, the evening is totally ignored by everyone outside the film-makers' coterie, and it has been since the Ten Best competition began in 1936.

In no other field does the professional harbour such antagonism towards the amateur. Professional and amateur photographers, astronomers and archaeologists feed off each other, but in the cinema the feeding is unilateral—i.e. the amateur adapts and refines developments of the commercial cinema. The professional equates amateur films with babies on lawns, never bothers with them and consequently learns nothing. It was chance more than anything else that brought amateurs Ken Russell, Peter Watkins and Bob Godfrey out of their netherworld; and one of the very few amateurs to be discovered through his work is cartoonist Derek Phillips, a regular Ten Best winner, whose films have suddenly been labelled *avant garde* (and appeared under that heading in a recent NFT season).

The 1974 Ten Best selection was particularly representative of the range of technique and subject matter currently being tackled. *Horse Play*, made by a Canadian advertising executive, revives a method of animation first used by Disney to animate the human characters in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. *In God's Name* is arguably the first film to exploit the disturbances in Northern Ireland. It was shot in Hull by a local government officer, who has long had a Russell-like fondness for shocking people. *Special Offer* is two minutes of throbbing factory machinery intricately cut by an Essex farmer to Khachaturian's 'Sabre Dance'; *Earth-shrinker to London* is four minutes of travelogue edited in eye-blink style by a London sound recordist (it's an exemplary holiday movie); and *One Man's Meat* is a ghoulish black comedy well on the way to being mistaken for an episode of *Night Gallery*. It was shot on 8mm with lip-synch by a well-known amateur named Arthur Smith, whose previous efforts include *Doppelgänger*, a film made in collaboration with Philip Jenkinson when he too was an aspiring film-maker.

'Mohammed, the Messenger of God': Anthony Quinn with the director, Moustapha Akkad. Photograph by David Farrell



'Even professional film-makers are looking with envy at what the amateur can do,' runs a current advertisement for ciné equipment. It refers especially to a new cassette-loading 8mm. camera which, apart from automatically focusing, zooming, checking the exposure and telling the operator when he is doing something wrong, also records optical sound directly on to the filmstock. Perhaps the amateur and the professional will one day be drawn closer together by their identical cameras.

DAVID MCGILLIVRAY

Minister of Energy

When John Houseman was in London in 1973, for the publication of his autobiography *Run-through*, he told us that he'd been doing 'a bit of acting in a friend's picture.' The picture, of course, was Jim Bridges' *The Paper Chase*, and Houseman achieved an effortless Oscar for his playing of the remote but far from ineffectual don. Intellectual astringency is one of the tones largely missing from contemporary cinema; Houseman's Harvard law professor was armoured in it.

Now he's back in England, amiably relaxed, at 72, about adding the role of movie star to those of producer, impresario and teacher. Houseman is playing in *Rollerball*, which Norman Jewison has been completing at Pinewood after strenuous location work at one of the Olympic stadia in Munich. His part—the heavy again, of course—is that of Minister of Energy in a moderately futuristic society, when the giant international corporations have finally put paid to the old nation-states. Energy seems to have diversified from fuel and power, and its Minister also controls a team at *Rollerball*, a brutal but sophisticated development from present styles in ice hockey and roller derbies. The gladiatorial game keeps the populace quiet; and since most players go out of the game feet first, there's no risk of sports



'Rollerball': John Houseman, as the Energy impresario, visits his team

mythology producing dangerously durable heroes.

Individualism, however, strikes again. The plot, as Houseman tells it, concerns one player (James Caan) who refuses to retire and won't get killed. The Minister, rejecting the easy option of having him quietly put away, tries to dispose of him within the rules of the game—or rather, by adapting the rules to make the track even more of a killing ground. The climax sounds like a scene to bring the stunt men out in force.

Houseman is keeping in regular contact with both his theatre company and his drama school. The casualty would seem to be the projected second volume of his autobiography, the record of his last thirty years in radio, movies, theatre and television. But meanwhile his new profession is clearly more than the whim of seeing things for a while from the other side of the camera. Acting is 'enjoyable and lucrative'; also serious.

In Germany, the extras fussed about the way things were organised and complained that they were being poisoned by motorbike exhaust fumes. In England, he's mildly startled at the amount of tea and buns the crew get through during a working day. He echoes a comment one has heard before, that English crews are magnificently adaptable on location but much more rule-bound on home ground. He finds the British cinema situation one of the world's worst, in terms of actually getting films out to audiences.

We mention Pauline Kael's celebrated *New Yorker* article, with its gloomy view of audiences taking their marching orders from advertisers. Kael naturally leads to *Kane*; about which Houseman feels that everyone, including himself, has now probably said enough. We talk about Hitchcock, with whom he worked on *Saboteur*. Over dinner recently, he told Houseman the plot of his new film, an adaptation of Victor

Canning's *The Rainbird Pattern*. It's a complicated story; Houseman couldn't follow it, and even Hitchcock admitted to some perplexity. Sighing somewhat, he returned to his script. 'His work,' Houseman says, 'in an extraordinarily total way really is his life.'

He talks about Ingrid Bergman, whom he directed years ago in *Anna Christie*, and now intriguingly finds 'at her best in years' as the tremulous missionary lady in *Murder on the Orient Express*. Perhaps, he suggests, 'it's because she is allowed to be Swedish again.' And about Raymond Chandler, with whom he worked on *The Blue Dahlia*. Chandler became extremely incensed when Houseman criticised the private eye as the ideal of the hero. But in moments when Hollywood became too much for him, Philip Marlowe's creator would turn to Houseman with the plea that 'we public school boys must stick together.' 'I hadn't the heart,' Houseman says, 'to tell him that Dulwich College wasn't quite in the top league of public schools—it took too many day boys.' He goes off in search of a Number 9 bus, to deliver him to a tea party with the lady who was once the first Mrs. Orson Welles. One rather hopes that the charms of playing Energy boss won't keep him too long from completing his autobiography.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

Pesaro 1974

Any festival devoted to 'new cinema', no matter what it elects to screen, is letting itself in for difficulties simply because the adjective 'new' is so ambiguous. The problems of selection at the roth Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema, at Pesaro, were even more complex, because it is the most politically oriented festival now operating on a regular basis. Trying to incorporate new

specifically political cinema, as well as cinema which is 'new' in approach to narrative or technique, the Festival assumed the disjointed ambience of several loosely connected but distinctly separate events.

Ignoring the new movement in its own national cinema (what might be called 'neo-neo-realism' as practised by Francesco Rosi in *Lucky Luciano*, Florestano Vancini in *Il Delitto Matteotti*, or Carlo Lizzani in *Mussolini, Ultimo Atto*), Pesaro contented itself with a retrospective of some fifty (many rarely seen) neo-realist films. These well-attended screenings—including the complete work of Rossellini from 1945 to 1953—revealed even greater riches than one remembered; and provided a firm base from which to observe the new Italian realism, even if one had to look for the more recent films beyond the festival itself.

Few of the political entries could bear comparison with the power and poetry of such older anti-fascist films as Vergano's *Il Sole Sorge Ancora* (1946); which may have been one reason they were not so well attended. Of the 16 features and shorts from Chile, only one transcended its immediate political context: Miguel Littin's *La Tierra Prometida*. Littin's stylised (indeed, entirely non-realistic) approach to the creation of a socialist communal action, which prefigures the Allende government's rise and fall, results in a rather odd mixture of early Glauber Rocha and middle period Jancsó. Yet the film succeeds as an integrated work, perhaps because it was first conceived in filmic terms. The other Chilean films, as well as those from Cuba, Lebanon, Brazil and Bolivia,

were concerned with content to the almost complete exclusion of method.

One result of this approach is a bored and restless (even if ideologically sympathetic) audience, particularly within a one-track festival situation in which the informing idea remains the same through film after film. After a time, even the lack of coherent cinematic vision begins to take on a deceiving appearance of method misfired: an interview here, an amateurishly 're-enacted' event there, slogans to replace either dialogue or analytic narrative. The presence of many of the directors—few of them 'professional' cineastes—helped in discussion to bridge the gaps between the audience at Pesaro and the intended national contexts of the films. But it is not surprising that such discussions were more concerned with political events than with the films.

Just how 'new' Otar Ioseliani's *There Was Once a Singing Blackbird* may be, outside the context of current Soviet cinema, is a moot point. Its loosely structured tale of an adventurous day in the life of a charming ne'er-do-well musician resembles the wonderfully bitter-sweet films of daily life which comprised the sadly defunct 'new wave' of Czech, Hungarian and Yugoslav films during the 1960s. The film is marred by a gratuitous and anti-climactic ending in which the protagonist is killed by a car: perhaps the product of a conservative society in its law-and-order mood (do 'non-productive' citizens always suffer?). In any case, the possibility was one on which the director nervously but adamantly refused to comment.

Two other directors attempted

new approaches to narrative from both within and without a nationalistic context: Victor Erice with *The Spirit of the Beehive* and Thomas Koerfer with *Death of the Flea Circus Director*. But both films have been on the festival circuit long enough to have lost some of their novelty if none of their power. Besides, if it were only 'newness' one sought from Pesaro, those fifty neo-realist films would not have remained the festival's freshest and most explosive section. In this respect, Pesaro must be judged some kind of success.

DAVID L. OVERBEY

Tom Brandon in London

In London to present American social and political films of the Thirties and early Forties at the Collegiate Theatre, Tom Brandon seemed to carry a lot of history with him. In 1931 he had helped found the Workers Film and Photo League and the National Film and Photo League, spearhead organisations of America's documentary movement, which screened experimental films, offered practical instruction and produced their own newsreels—covering aspects of the Depression ignored by the commercial companies. He had an illustrious band of colleagues: Jay Leyda, Sidney Meyers, Ralph Steiner, Irving Lerner, Ben Maddow, Paul Strand, Elia Kazan.

Brandon was one of the few who remained on the periphery of film-making, becoming a leading independent distributor. Now he is involved in tracking down and restoring 'lost' prints,

documenting an area of cinema neglected by the traditional textbooks. His current programme is a modest media show, comprising films, slides (mostly newspaper headlines and photographs), music (folk songs of the era), plus his own commentary (unfortunately missing from the public show; Brandon had to return to the States on family matters).

First there were examples of the Leagues' newsreels, in which Leo Seltzer and other hardy cameramen strove to capture scenes of Depression unrest throughout the country. Their footage showed the march of time with a harsh, strident beat: determined protesters straddling the steps of the Capitol at the climax of the National Hunger March in 1932; Ford workers at Dearborn the same year, attacked by the police and factory thugs. Other films had a fictional framework: *Pie in the Sky*, a *jeu d'esprit* principally made by Elia 'Gadget' Kazan (as he is identified in the credits) and Ralph Steiner; *Millions of Us*, a naive and affecting treatment of a workers' strike and the need for union solidarity, pseudonymously directed in Hollywood by 'Jack Smith' and 'Tina Taylor' (with montage sequences suggesting the hand of Slavko Vorkapich).

Pie in the Sky is stamped by an East Coast ambience: its humour is ethnic and cerebral, its method improvisatory and theatrical. *New Masses* called it 'a splendid beginning towards revolutionary comedy-pantomime,' and time hasn't dimmed its high spirits or resonance. Kazan and Russell Collins (a fellow Group Theatre actor) appear as two young tramps who set off to mock society's orthodoxies after failing to get a slice of a mission priest's apple pie; the two romp about a junkyard in Queens, improvising comedy around found objects, recalling the antics of silent clowns (the film has no soundtrack, and Kazan resembles a sad-eyed Harpo Marx) and anticipating both the happier fooling of *Hallelujah the Hills* and some of the demeanour of Beckett's tramps.

Here, Brandon suggested, one saw the best kind of improvisation: quirkily inventive, bursting with energy—a favourable contrast to the early efforts of Norman Mailer (which he refused to distribute). One can only hope that Brandon will continue to bring forgotten films back into the public arena, for they fill an important gap in cinema history and provide potent lessons for politically sensitive film-makers.

GEOFF BROWN and
JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

Earth shattering

'It is regrettable . . . that the British Broadcasting Corporation—so often a champion of human rights—should transmit on BBC-2 an anti-religious Soviet propaganda film entitled *Earth*. The film portrayed Ukrainian peasants starving to death and in subtitles

Topol in Joseph Losey's production of Brecht's 'Galileo', made for the American Film Theatre



identified churchmen and *kulaks* (small landowners) as the "guilty men" responsible...

Its message of incitement places it on a par with the Nazi propaganda films being made at the same period to inflame a hatred which sent six million Jews to the gas ovens. Is the BBC now to start running similar "classics" of the German cinema? Or will it consign this corrosive, mind-bending propaganda to the trash-can where it properly belongs...?

'If it is the BBC's wish to treat one of the greatest crimes against humanity with the historical accuracy that truth demands, why does the Corporation not dispatch a *Panorama* team to the Soviet Union to find out just who did murder the peasants and *kulaks* in the inter-war years?'

—Letter to *The Times*, November 9, 1974, from Mr. Winston S. Churchill, M.P.

'Mr. Churchill has made a fool of himself. *Earth* is generally recognised as one of the most beautiful films ever made and its director as one of the greatest in the history of cinema.'

—Letter to *The Times*, November 14, from Mr. Basil Wright.

1974: Obituary

DECEMBER '73: Benn Levy, playwright, politician and occasional scriptwriter (*Blackmail*); Willy Birgel, German romantic lead (*Die schwarze Rosen*); Bobby Darin, American singer turned actor (*Hell is for Heroes*, *Too Late Blues*); Crystal Dennis, silent star; Käthe von Nagy, Hungarian-born star of pre-war French musicals.

JANUARY: Gianni Esposito, introverted romantic hero of French cinema (Renoir's *Cancan*); Tex Ritter, archetypal singing cowboy; Gino Cervi, rugged Italian actor, best known as the Communist mayor in *Don Camillo*; Alma Taylor, star of British silent films (*David Copperfield*, *Comin' thro' the Rye*); Michael Salkind, producer, from Pabst's *Joyless Street* to Orson Welles' *The Trial*; Maxim Shtraukh, Russian actor who specialised in looking like Lenin; Randal MacDougall, American scriptwriter (*Mildred Pierce*, *The Hasty Heart*, *Objective Burma*), latterly TV writer and director; Samuel Goldwyn, who wanted nothing but the best (*Wuthering Heights*, *The Little Foxes*, *Guys and Dolls*).

FEBRUARY: Anna Q. Nilsson, Swedish-born silent star who reappeared in *Sunset Boulevard*; Lothar Mendes, Hungarian-born director who worked in Germany (*Liebe macht blind*), Hollywood (*Interference*) and England (*The Man Who Could Work Miracles*); Harry Ruby, song-writer and producer of *Animal Crackers*; Carole Lesley, British starlet (*Those Dangerous Years*, *Doctor in Love*).

MARCH: Lillian 'Red Wing' St. Cyr, who starred in the original *Squaw Man*; Charles Rosher,

British-born cameraman whose Hollywood career stretched from Murnau (*Sunrise*) and Mary Pickford to *Showboat* and *Kiss Me Kate*; Clotilde Joano, elegantly elongated French actress (*Les Bonnes Femmes*); Françoise Rosay, whose versatile and ageless professionalism graced films by Renoir, Clair, Carné, Feyder.

APRIL: Robert Youngson, American producer of compilation films (*The Golden Age of Comedy*); Patricia Collinge, supporting actress (*The Little Foxes*, *Shadow of a Doubt*); Douglas Dumbrille, durable Hollywood character actor, smooth villain or comic foil (*Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *A Day at the Races*); Robert Goldstein, American producer (*Black Tuesday*); Marcel Pagnol, veteran French writer-director, best remembered for the *Marius-Fanny-César* trilogy; Bud Abbott, Costello's other half; Agnes Moorehead, ever-dependable actress who portrayed many a memorable lady (*The Magnificent Ambersons*, *Mrs Parkington*, *The Woman in White*).

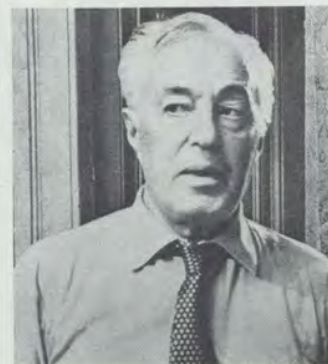
MAY: Hal Mohr, Hollywood cameraman for *The Jazz Singer*, *Phantom of the Opera* and Reinhardt's *Midsummer Night's Dream*; Donald Crisp, Scottish-born Hollywood character actor of patriarchal stature (*Broken Blossoms*, *How Green Was My Valley*), also silent director (co-director of Keaton's *Navigator*); Duke Ellington, king of jazz; Leontine Sagan, German script-writer and director of *Mädchen in Uniform*.

JUNE: Blanche Yurka, German-American character actress specialising in sinister ladies (*Tale of Two Cities*, *Queen of the Mob*); Maurice Cowan, British film journalist; Francis Blanche, veteran French character actor; Darius Milhaud, composer; Marcel Pérès, whose fifty years on the French screen ended with Buñuel's *Fantôme de la Liberté*; Pauline Carton, French character actress in many Guitry films.

JULY: Parker Tyler, perceptive and esoteric American critic; Leon Shamroy, veteran Hollywood cameraman (*You Only Live Once*, *Twelve O'Clock High*, *Planet of the Apes*).

AUGUST: Ilona Massey, Hungarian-born Hollywood actress (*Rosalie*, *Love Happy*); Robert Rounseville, opera singer hero of *The Tales of Hoffmann*; Albert Parker, pioneer British director; Compton Bennett, who directed *The Seventh Veil*; Almira Sessions, French-born actress whose 65-year career spanned early Hollywood silents, Renoir's *Diary of a Chambermaid* and *Rosemary's Baby*; Peggy Castle, American actress, mainly in 50s' Westerns; Erik Charrel, German director (*Congress Dances*).

SEPTEMBER: Odette Rousseau (Florelle), French cabaret singer who appeared in Pabst's *Threepenny Opera* and Renoir's *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*; Walter



Françoise Rosay, Vittorio De Sica, Agnes Moorehead

Brennan, dependable character actor who often upstaged the stars (*The Westerner*, *To Have and Have Not*, *Rio Bravo*); Arnold Fanck, German director of mountain films (*The White Hell of Pitz Palü*) and mentor to Leni Riefenstahl.

OCTOBER: Olga Baklanova, sultry Russian-born Hollywood actress, often playing vamps (*The Great Lover*, *Freaks*, *Street of Sin*); René Dary, who started as the most famous baby in French cinema (*Bébé*) and ended as a specialist in gangster roles (*Touchez pas au Grisbi*); Robert Cox, one of the original Keystone Cops.

NOVEMBER: Johnny Mack Brown, veteran American actor (*Billy the Kid*, *The Last Flight*), later typed as Western star; Clive Brook, suave British actor, the archetypal English gentleman in *Shanghai Express*, director of the comedy *On Approval*; Moura Budberg, Russian-born baroness, influential figure in the arts in London for many years and one-time personal adviser to Alexander Korda; Vittorio De Sica, neo-realist.

1974: The Top Ten

CHINATOWN *** THE CONVERSATION *** DIRTY MONEY *** THE GOALKEEPER'S FEAR OF THE PENALTY *** MEAN STREETS *** MISSISSIPPI MERMAID *** THE PARALLAX VIEW *** SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE *** SIGNS OF LIFE *** WHAT?

—Richard Combs

AGUIRRE, WRATH OF GOD *** COMPANY LIMITED *** FEAR EATS THE SOUL *** THE GOALKEEPER'S FEAR OF THE PENALTY *** JUVENILE COURT *** LACOMBE LUCIEN *** MACUNAIMA *** THE MOTHER AND THE WHORE *** PIROSMANI *** SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE

—Jan Dawson

AGUIRRE, WRATH OF GOD *** AMERICAN GRAFFITI *** CHINATOWN *** THE CONVERSATION *** DILLINGER *** FEAR EATS THE SOUL *** LACOMBE LUCIEN *** MY AIN FOLK *** NADA *** THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE

—Philip French

CHINATOWN *** COMPANY LIMITED *** THE CONVERSATION *** FEAR EATS THE SOUL *** THE LAST DETAIL *** THE PARALLAX VIEW *** LE PETIT THEATRE DE JEAN RENOIR *** PIROSMANI *** SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE *** THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE

—John Gillett

AGUIRRE, WRATH OF GOD *** CHINATOWN *** COMPANY LIMITED *** THE CONVERSATION *** FEAR EATS THE SOUL *** MY AIN FOLK *** NADA *** LE PETIT THEATRE DE JEAN RENOIR *** THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE *** THE THREE MUSKETEERS

—Penelope Houston

LE PETIT THEATRE DE JEAN RENOIR *** MEAN STREETS *** WHAT? *** TONI *** KID BLUE *** CHINATOWN *** DILLINGER *** NADA *** LACOMBE LUCIEN *** COCK-FIGHTER

—Tom Milne

AGUIRRE, WRATH OF GOD *** L'ARROSEUR ARROSE, AFTER LUMIERE *** DIRTY MONEY *** EKA KATAPPA *** FEAR EATS THE SOUL *** DIE GEBURT DER NATION *** THE GOALKEEPER'S FEAR OF THE PENALTY *** GOLDEN SWALLOW *** PANDEMONIUM (SHURA) *** LA REGION CENTRALE

—Tony Rayns

AGUIRRE, WRATH OF GOD *** AMARCORD *** COCKFIGHTER *** THE CONVERSATION *** THE MOTHER AND THE WHORE *** PENTHESILEA: QUEEN OF THE AMAZONS *** LE PETIT THEATRE DE JEAN RENOIR *** SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE *** TONI *** WHAT?

—Jonathan Rosenbaum

ZARDOZ *** DILLINGER *** PIROSMANI *** LE PETIT THEATRE DE JEAN RENOIR *** NADA *** THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE *** THE MOTHER AND THE WHORE *** EL TOPO *** MON ONCLE ANTOINE *** SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE

—Philip Strick



'1900'

Utopia visited

Excerpts from a diary on
the set of '1900'

*'In today's Italy, only he who does not really
love the people can be a political optimist.'*—
Pier Paolo Pasolini, September 1974

I once made a TV film about Bernardo Bertolucci in which he was seen filming, letter by letter, on a typewriter, with the camera trained on the type as it hit the paper, a film script. It was meant to be a protest action: since nobody in those days would give him money to make a film, he was 'making the film' himself, filming it being *written*. The literary base of Bertolucci's work stems from his beginnings as a poet. He says he could have gone on to the novel, but chose cinema instead, trying to maintain the same freedom he would enjoy if he wrote books. He has come a long way, with this method, from the days when his projects found no takers. Today, he is by far the most commercial 'property' in Italian cinema, and maybe in the world.

His concerns are with spaces, within which he 'writes' his scenes in autonomous forms, with lights, which help him create those forms, and with the interaction of characters within those spaces. Each scene is covered from a variety of angles; often a cover shot in wide angle will take only 20 seconds, but the detailed cutaways, dissecting time psychologically, will extend its duration or limit it dramatically. Since autonomy of form for each shot, based on his intuition for finding each sequence's optimum expression, often means discontinuity between shots, the real creative act begins when all the long shots, medium shots, and the great variety of close-ups that are produced for every sequence, are thrown together as raw material on the cutting table.

Gideon Bachmann

This creates specific working requirements. Rushes are developed daily and screened as soon as they arrive, often in rented cutting rooms or old cinemas of the region. Kim Arcalli, Bertolucci's editor, begins to put scenes together on a rented, local moviola, as the shooting proceeds. But as these activities are part of the creative process for him and not just technical finishing necessities, he admits no strangers or journalists to them. To have an impression of the film during the production period is thus extremely difficult. In addition, he changes his shooting plan in accordance with the impression he receives from the material already cut. Bertolucci has always, in some ways, been an innovator, and the research he is now undertaking is into the cinema itself: being a form of volume and of extremes, he is attempting to seek out its limits. After *Last Tango*, he knew that his moment had come to command any means that this search would require.

I went up to see him shoot for a day, and remained a week. Normally, on a set, one can perceive the vibrations and future characteristics of the about-to-be-born work. In this case, because of the technique involved and because of the tensions that surround the use, by a single intelligence, of such enormous, non-cohering forces, I felt my perceptions dulled. A vague uneasiness took root as the days progressed. Both the man and his creation seemed shifting in their tones and emanations. I

described what I saw in the mood in which I saw it.

August 23

A film set is a microcosm upon which the often unlimited flow of means and the topographical isolation have conferred an extraterrestrial status. Like a satellite, it consumes energies without immediately visible results. Its rulers, removed from the flow of ordinary life, often become absolute. Involved in the business of producing illusions, they may fall victim to their own. The most common of these is the notion that what they are doing is important.

This seems one logical explanation for the rather sanctimonious aura that pervades the soggy, hot air as I arrive at 'Le Piacentine', the enormous mid-nineteenth century farm enclave not far from the Po river where Bernardo Bertolucci is shooting the most expensive film ever made to date in Italy. That, in any case, is the first fact we are given by Nico Naldini, PEA's publicist, who has trekked up with us from Rome. No way of comparing it with *Cabiria* or *Quo Vadis*, since those were made in days when the Lira was money. A quick calculation tells me that the money about to be spent on the making of this new epic, entitled *1900* (because it's the story of the century so far) would buy 14,278,000 loaves of bread. Six and a half million dollars. With Italian inflation, by the time it's finished, in late 1975, it could end up costing nearer ten million.

Promises for the day. Burt Lancaster in his dying scene. A stable full of 300 cows that had to be brought from Switzerland because the cows they had in Italy at the beginning of the century were a greyish brown; today's cows aren't. An interview with Bertolucci. Lunch at Italy's only 3-star Michelin restaurant, in a village nearby where Verdi was born. Then some time observing the shooting. And, delectable morsel, one of the film's eighteen major sex scenes.

None of this materialises. Burt Lancaster throws everyone out of the barn; he wants to die alone. Bertolucci won't talk alone; he promises a press conference instead. The lunch is thus hurriedly reconvened in a tourist restaurant in Parma. Emilian kitchen, famous for centuries, somewhat streamlined; restaurant called Stendhal, of course. I am told by crew members that everybody has put on weight. There is nothing else to do, so we try to do the same. Around five, lethargic and acquiescent, we are driven to Bertolucci's villa. It is not the one he used in *The Spider's Stratagem*, but that villa is only a few hundred feet away. The same kind of architectural decadence. The grandeur of the past clings reluctantly to the dusty corners. Espaliers of wild chestnuts flank fields of rotting water-melons. A wild-eyed Emilian servant, undoubtedly to please us, plays the hi-fi at top level, Italian pop. Every time I turn it down, he turns it up, convinced I had meant to increase the level. No Bertolucci, and we drink the local white wine (Sauvignon, a linguistic heritage of Napoleonic splendour) and fight swarms of mosquitoes on the terrace for two hours, until at around eight he comes home from the set.

Press conference, and plenty of surprises.

Bertolucci says that he is making a politically positive film. It is constructed around the day of liberation, April 25, 1945, from which Italians date some sort of national identity. A peasants' republic is declared in the farmyard, and the fascists, whose doings make up a good part of the salient and more evidently saleable part of the film, are punished. Then the film flashes forward and backward, showing first the childhood of two boys and then their amities and enmities, until in old age, in a portion of the script still to be written, they get to some sort of consciousness of their political and social situation. In the meantime, we are to see fascism rise and fall, loves grow and die, and Italy struggling to save its agricultural heritage and culture.

Callisto Cosulich, the *Paese Sera* critic from Rome, and one of the few Italian critics who sees films from a non-hermetic stance, has dug up an old interview of mine with Bertolucci (*The Guardian*, March 14, 1973), which he quotes back to him. At that time, Bertolucci had been pessimistic, saying that 'peasant culture, a civilisation that has lasted thousands of years, has practically died in only fifty to seventy years of industrial "progress".' The phrase he had used most often when talking about his new film had been 'the agony of the land'. How come he now sees everything more optimistically? Also, Cosulich asks, isn't he afraid that after *Last Tango*, in which many 'misunderstood the sexual scenes', the large public will again flock to this new film just because—at least according to the script—it seems full of sex and cruelty?

Franco Arcalli, co-writer and editor of Bertolucci's films, jumps up and defends *Last Tango*. The artist can't be concerned with misinterpretations of intent. Callisto Cosulich argues that an aware person realises how reactions are construed, and shapes his material accordingly. Nico thinks this is a subject better discussed over dinner, and since everybody is hungry the issue dies. We get to know another Emilian restaurant.

August 24

Since neither sex scenes nor major actors are expected, no journalists mar the horizon. It is the end of summer in the Po valley. Grapes are ripe, nuts are beginning, apples everywhere, harvest in the offing. Heavy, damp, somewhat unseasonal fogs hang over the plains at dusk. An atmosphere heavy with fruit, with slow, moist reaping. Bertolucci is filming youth.

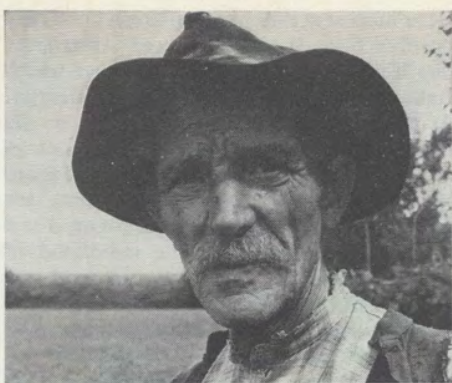
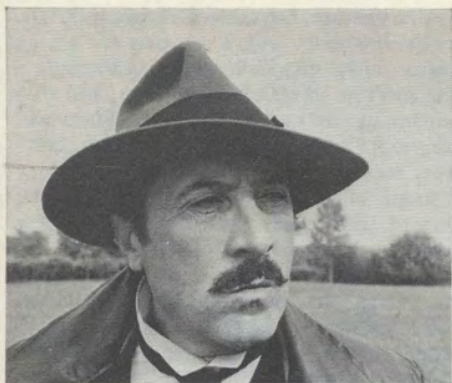
It turns out that he has divided the film into four seasons, according to those of the year, like Debussy. Summertime, youth and innocence; autumn and winter, adolescence, maturity and decadence; spring, wisdom, rebirth and hope. In political, historical terms: pre-fascist, fascist and post-fascist eras. The dialectic carries into the private lives of the characters: one boy of the pair born on the same day is the son of the landowner and obviously becomes a fascist, the other is the peasant's son and will defend the Left. The first one seems full of conflicts. Bertolucci seems to say that he's predestined by his class. The good one, of course, is just as predestined, but has no apparent conflicts. When I read the script (a for-

bidden venture, but since it's lying about the set everywhere . . .), I see that the action seems fairly one-dimensional. (Though a film can't be judged from a script, and who can say in any case how far Bertolucci will keep to it?) All of human debasement, however, seems to be heaped on the head of a single character, Attila (!), the fascist. Donald Sutherland will have to play few nuances of character. Laura Betti, his succubus mistress, her high-class origins accounting for her low-class behaviour, plays his woman, goading him into one sexual excess after another. The couple navigate through the film like the *tamburi* in Stravinsky, punctuating every dramatic change. Laura Betti had played a part in *Tango*, but had been left on the cutting-room floor. In this film, that doesn't seem likely to happen.

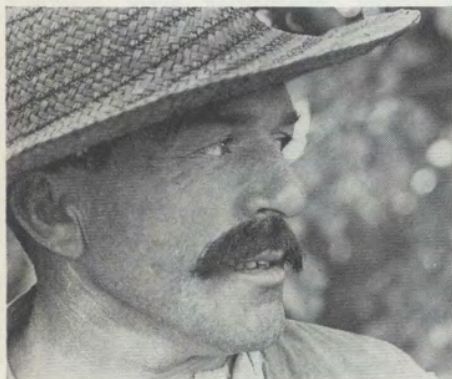
Reading the script, I am beginning to share Cosulich's reserves. So many of these scenes, at least as read, seem gratuitous. Why does a little boy, after having been sodomised and sandwiched between the lovers in a rape scene, have to have his brains flung in every direction, while being swung around by his feet against the wooden pole of a pigsty by Attila? Why does Alida Valli have to end up spiked naked on to the iron spokes of her villa's gate, so that Attila and his mistress can stake a claim to her property? And why does the script portray in such extravagant detail only the worst of the sex in the film, and skirt the various possibilities to depict poetic encounters?

It is one of the first things that I bring up as Bertolucci agrees to talk to me and my tape recorder, from time to time, between shots. Attila, for him, is 'the materialisation of the aggression dormant in all the characters around him, which they suppress or choose not to express. He represents all the destructive forces. His ferocity is as senseless and absurd as that of the fascists in our days, who claim to be motivated historically. But in Italy we have a working class that will forever hinder the return of fascism. The fascists' gestures are thus absurd and useless, like those of Attila.'

This gets me back, in the next break, to where he had left off at the press conference. Where did he find his new optimism? He quotes Gramsci to me: 'Pessimism of intelligence and optimism of will power.' Maybe he has inherited the reflex action of falling back on the words of the founder of Italy's communist party from one of his spiritual fathers, Pasolini, though Pasolini himself has gone beyond such phrases. In any case, when he came to Emilia to do research on the film, Bertolucci says that he found those alive and aware faces of the peasants, who far from having allowed their culture to decline, are socially and politically conscious and involved in endeavours for the saving of their heritage. In that sense, he says, being optimistic will make his film truly popular, will make it a film 'of the people' inasmuch as it will represent their reality and their aspirations. It will be the film in which the 'figura del padrone', the idea of the boss, will die. But he agrees that this is also rather utopian. 'I said that the idea of the boss dies. As a social individual, as a social fact. It's a perspective, true. He hasn't died yet. But anyway it's time to stop crying. We have made lamenting films



19



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Photographs by
Gideon Bachmann and
Deborah Beer



*Bertolucci (left) and the
'1900' unit on location
near Parma*



for ten years and I'm tired of announcing our anxieties all the time. The cinema of the sixties was a cinema of constant weeping.'

It is Burt Lancaster's last day—a retake of a moment at the beginning of the youth and innocence part of the film. As the grand old dad of all landowners, he has to do two small scenes: read a letter proclaiming the birth of the first of his sons into the new century, and go and get some wine bottles to celebrate the event from the snow-filled garden cave where his vintage is stored. We see the second important set of the film, the landowner's villa, supposedly near the farm but actually some forty kilometres of rainy road away. Another of those disintegrating palaces, rented for eight months. There is a summer storm, but by the time Lancaster unwraps from his light blue track suit and alights from his Mercedes, a rainbow appears. Tempers and skies clear. No pictures of Lancaster allowed, however. In the lunch hour, when all munch happily on their distributed baskets, he is off like a shot. Fifty minutes later he is back from five miles of tracking, doffs the fatigues, dons the false belly and the cutaway, unsmiling as before, and goes back to getting his bottles out.

Someone on the set tells me the story of Lancaster's death scene the day before. Coming across a group of dancing peasants in the wood towards the end of his potent years, he leads a small girl to the barn where she milks a cow. He then leads her hand to his parts, realising that his abilities have left him, as the girl laughs. Sending her away to tell the peasants that the master is dead, he removes his shoes, flops barefoot through the wet cow dung to the window and hangs himself. . .

The garden set is real. Snow brought from the Piedmontese mountains used to keep for months in those caves, cooling the wine. Giacomo Rizzo, a Neapolitan actor whose part runs through the film like a grotesque, plays a hunchback who serves, as the generations parade before us, one master after another. As Burt Lancaster enters the cave, the hunchback, in incongruous Rigoletto costume, spies on his movements through a crack. A stout Emilian priest peering Punch-like from among the branches is to ask him what he sees, and he is to say 'bottles'. Since the film is being shot, incongruously, not only in direct sound (unusual for Italy) but also in English, these two midrange actors are forced to repeat again and again the words 'What else?' and 'Bottles.' In the scene this is to be repeated four times and the priest is to burst into operatic song.

The afternoon advances as time and again these two ludicrous figures make futile attempts to scream English words into the countryside. After almost three hours of 'Wottels, Bottels, Wottels, Bottels. . .' it starts to rain again. Never will this scene, invented on the spot by Bertolucci, like many others, find space in the finished film, which already promises to exceed six hours in length and seems to have originally been planned as a TV series. It's not the first shot that everybody knows will be cut. I make a second quick calculation. The daily cost of the film, based on its eight-month shooting schedule, is twenty-seven thousand and eighty-three dollars.

August 25

What is it that makes film directors so sure of their value? Whence this presumption of being involved in an activity that must take precedence over other human obligations? Haven't we perhaps allowed them too much mythology, too much adoration? There seems to attach to film-making in these politicised years an automatic social alibi: making films seems to be a surrogate for living in direct contact with reality, and bestows, furthermore, that nebulous awe which controlling a lot of money and a lot of fates entails. There must be a reason why first films are so often better and more sincere; they are usually made with less pretence.

It is Sunday, and Bertolucci has promised the interview at his villa. At eleven we call off plans to visit Mantova and Busseto, because he hasn't called yet. At two he wants to postpone us to the late afternoon. By five he expects Marcello Mastroianni, coming up to try for a part. By seven he thinks he'll have to invite Marcello to stay over. By eight he promises me tomorrow's lunch hour. I have seen these lunch hours, during which he sits over a tray at a camp table. Production difficulties intervene. A stream of assistants broach problems. Since light must match, pauses are brief.

I spend the day in bed reading the rest of the script—the part of it that has been written. When I have finished, I've been through 1900, through 1912, 1918, the Twenties and Thirties. For me, the scene in 1945 that brings volume two of the type-script to a halt could easily end the film. A pitchfork brandished by a woman has spiked the dreaded Attila to a railway embankment. A teenager has picked up a rifle to go after the landowner. The peasants have exploded into revolution. The eye for an eye carnage is stopped at the last moment by Reason. It rounds out beautifully, and could pass for one of those films that 'ends with a question mark designed to make the spectator think.'

August 26

This Monday Bertolucci wants to use yesterday's rain, but today the sun shines. Fans, watertank trucks, pipes and wires all through the vineyard. Long camera tracks again. He has become a tracking director, and hardly ever shoots a scene without a track. But each movement within the frame is limited to the shot it is contained in. Elaborate tracks are laid without much apparent attention to where the shot will end up in cutting. I have seen him lay as much as 120 feet of straight track, riding his camera boom like an express train. He doesn't feel that having a constantly mobile camera creates problems in cutting. His intuition tells him, he says, to find in each case the best way to shoot a scene and somehow, in the cutting room, 'it always seems to fit.' I must take this up with Arcalli; I know that on *Last Tango* they spent months 'making it fit.' But there they were not dealing with fields, and there *were* stationary shots. And most of the lighting was indoor and could be controlled to match at the linkages.

It's goodbye to Burt Lancaster today. He hasn't recognised me. Our last encounter

had been in the garden of the U.S. Consulate in Venice, during a festival reception. He had grabbed my tape recorder and tried to throw it into the canal, because he claimed that I was recording his conversation. I had been. The American consul had saved my Nagra and the spool that had held the tape. Not the tape.

Peter Shepherd, Bertolucci's assistant, and the memory of another previous encounter: Persia and the set of Pasolini's *1001 Nights*. We had done a BBC radio interview about how Pasolini works, and I had felt, in that darkened hotel room in Isfahan, where we had fled to escape the noise of modern Iran, all the admiration that this delicate Scotsman holds for the poet of the Italian streets. Now he has been offered a job on Pasolini's new film, *Saint Paul*. Should he quit Bertolucci? Peter Shepherd is a 'dialogue director', a job foreigners often hold on Italian productions, to help non-Italian actors with Italian and Italian actors with English. A typical job for a bastard industry, eternally unable to decide on an identity.

It is Sterling Hayden's last shooting day. He plays Lancaster's counterpart, and opposite, the grandfather of the peasant family. Sterling is warm, disorderly, present, talkative, engaged and generous. He lives on a houseboat in Paris and has ridden down to Parma on his motorcycle. *Wayfarer* all over again. A restless man, full of good instincts. Bertolucci calls him a hippy. No less accurate definition could be found. I suddenly realise that Bertolucci does this quite a bit. The day before yesterday, at the wottles-bottles scene, he called the set photographer, Angelo Novi, a 'paparazzo di quattro soldi' (a twopenny-halfpenny photographer), smiling in his face as if to say that he didn't really mean it. Angelo had looked back at him for a moment, hurt to his voluminous depths, and had then said, also with that smile that claims to be a smile but isn't, 'yes'. And at the threshing scene I had seen him saying to an old farmer, with that same double-bottomed smile, 'Aren't you an ugly old man, heh?'

Romolo Valli, who plays Burt Lancaster's son, is an intelligent Italian intellectual, surprised by and dubious of Bertolucci's optimism. It is he who has counted the sex scenes in the film for me. As the sun starts on its way towards the flat horizon, Romolo, Sterling and a group of peasants are introduced to one of Bertolucci's inventions. (Has it anything to do with the Van Gogh feeling of the flat, sunny fields, or the recent newspaper stories of Paul Getty Jr. getting married?) There has been a tempest; the peasants are being told by the landowner (Valli) that obviously their pay, like his profit, will have to be halved. One of them has the most protruding ears I have ever seen. A bit of added dialogue with Valli approaching that peasant: 'You there, speak up, you should be well enough able to have heard me!' Whereupon the peasant is to cut off his ear and hand it to Valli saying, 'If everything is yours, this must be yours, too.' Sunset.

All this is to be shot so that the camera movement underlines the dramatic impact of the gesture: a track, a crane, a hydraulic lift, a counterweight and a zoom lens. Water sprayed on to the vines all round, mud on our feet. Again and again the wardrobe

lady sprays droplets over Sterling's hat. The camera will jump high in the air, retreat with the arm movement of the peasant, redescend and watch Valli taking the dripping red rubber object in his hand. Vittorio Storaro, the director of photography, is in Rome visiting his sick wife. Enrico, his operator, is at the top of the pyramid, riding boom. Again and again the camera does its jump in the air, long pauses. The ear has to be rebuilt every time on the peasant's face; and Valli is accumulating a bunch of disgusting spongy objects under his camp chair. As the light goes, the race is on. Will Bertolucci get his customary six or seven shots in the can before nature rebels? Mario di Biase, the production supervisor, paces up and down through the mud. Enrico has all the heavy-gun reflectors brought up; he has been told by Storaro: artificial light only in moments of distress. Storaro, I'm told, believes in 'light from a single source, no mixture of energy types.'

The miracle achieved, with nature's and the make-up man's cooperation, I sort my tapes. Not a bad day, after all. I managed altogether to talk to Bertolucci in seven pauses. We have covered sex, politics, audiences, popularity and what that means, the story of the film as well as its history, its literary aspects, and he has agreed again that he is building his own utopia. But he doesn't think it's a very remote one, since he's convinced that the faces he sees around him don't lie. I am afraid that I don't see those peasants as politically conscious, certainly not to judge by their faces. We don't convince each other.

Today is the 100th anniversary of the first performance of Verdi's Requiem Mass. We go to Busseto, near his birthplace, and listen to the Mass sung by 500 singers from Verona in the village square. Thousands from all over Italy have come. It's the first truly enjoyable activity of the week.

August 27

This country fair of intrigues, psychological tensions, extravagance and confusion imposes its own atmosphere. Underneath it all one sees the clear shape of what it could be—perhaps may be. The real story of these people, caught between their own poverty and the promises of Mussolini; the reality of the men who made up that social movement early in the century that became fascism; their own cultural and physical misery, the lack of ideas that the era provided, the disappointments of the 1918 victories. All the earnest pioneers of the first industrial strikes of the 1890s, the agricultural strikes of the late 1910s, the suffragettes, the beginnings of a workers' movement. One appreciates the efforts of Gitt Magrini, for example, the costume designer, who has placed advertisements in the local press to collect early photographs and costumes from the area, and has had two thousand costumes made in exact replica of the things worn in the years the film traverses. Or the attempts of art director Enzo Frigerio and set dresser Maria Paola Maino to find and reconstruct an entire period and its feeling.

These are Bertolucci's own roots; he was born a few hundred yards from 'Le Piacentine', went to school in Parma, speaks

the dialect of the region, and has made two beautiful films here, sincere, small efforts that extol the provincial beauty of the people and do justice to their fears and limitations. Bertolucci says that all his scenes are based on research, that the epoch did produce cruelty from ignorance. One has read Silone, one believes him. There isn't a clear reason why he should not succeed in bringing it all off. But there is the gnawing doubt that this is not material for an extravaganza. Why the monumental form for the poetic, cruel content? I feel that as a creator he is on a razor's edge. Everybody on the set feels this, I suddenly realise. He has catapulted himself into the corner of his own arena, and everybody is watching with held breath. It all seems too big; I am missing the simplicity. Or am I wrong, and his is the right way?

Today they finish the youth part of the film. The two boys dance through the vines, play with the water spouts that recreate, every few minutes, the rain Bertolucci had missed shooting, and sit on his chair, play with his viewer, tug at the apache cap that he wears, *Jules and Jim* fashion, reversed. They are about to be sent home to their families with the money they have earned playing this fabulous game. Bernardo rides his rocket camera for the last time, rises high above the vineyard and peeps through its vines, confident at having reached the first whistle stop on his long voyage through the century. His brother Giuseppe has come, and Arcalli. Tonight they will sit down, at his villa, for one of their cumulative script conferences, to decide on next steps. A three-week shooting break beckons. Sterling is off to Spain on his motorcycle. Idallah Luria, the sympathetic American girl who has wound her way, by sheer insistence, into the job of assistant, is off to Rome, to see if she could live there in case the cinema and Italy continue holding their spell over her.

Mario and his seconds and thirds-in-command are all smiles. Tomorrow they will touch ground. Someone breaks out champagne. At the end of the day the field

is littered with the debris of our presence. Empty plastic cups, pieces of wire, cut-off plastic ears. Storaro's specially built enormous metal frames, holding 700 square feet of white reflecting material each, wander across the field, carried to their trucks by laughing, relieved men. The camera, alone on a tripod, suddenly unwanted and spent, is left for a moment in the middle of the field. With all the decor and the men gone, the cars departed and their noise abated, dusk and its dampness encroaching, I suddenly feel for this dead, metal object, alone there after having served its masters, useless now and deserted, that missing compassion I have not been able to feel for the man who wields it.

That night, we drive back to Rome. Perhaps in a year, seeing the film, I will feel differently. Today, rolling along in the dark and reliving the past few days, I am pervaded by a sense of sadness. I have known Bertolucci a long time, since his first film, *La Commare Secca*, in 1961. Pasolini had brought him to Venice, he was a young eager man with short hair and the Viareggio poetry prize fresh in his pocket. Even then his tongue flicked nervously from one corner of his mouth to the other; even then he had that smile of tomorrow on his lips. And now here I was, thirteen years later, and had seen his creativity in action, seen a triumph of talent, of perseverance, a young man at the top—the promise of the young cinema grown to full establishment proportions, the chubby figure looking more like Balzac every day.

Maybe Laura Betti, his old friend, is right: 'Bernardo is fighting, all the time, to liberate himself from his many fathers. Pasolini is the most important of these, of course. And Bernardo's real father, a great poet and critic. But he is a true talent, a fighter. All his neuroses, his analyses, his girlfriends, won't deter him. After all, this is his moment.' There can be no doubt about that. The question is, what will he make of it?

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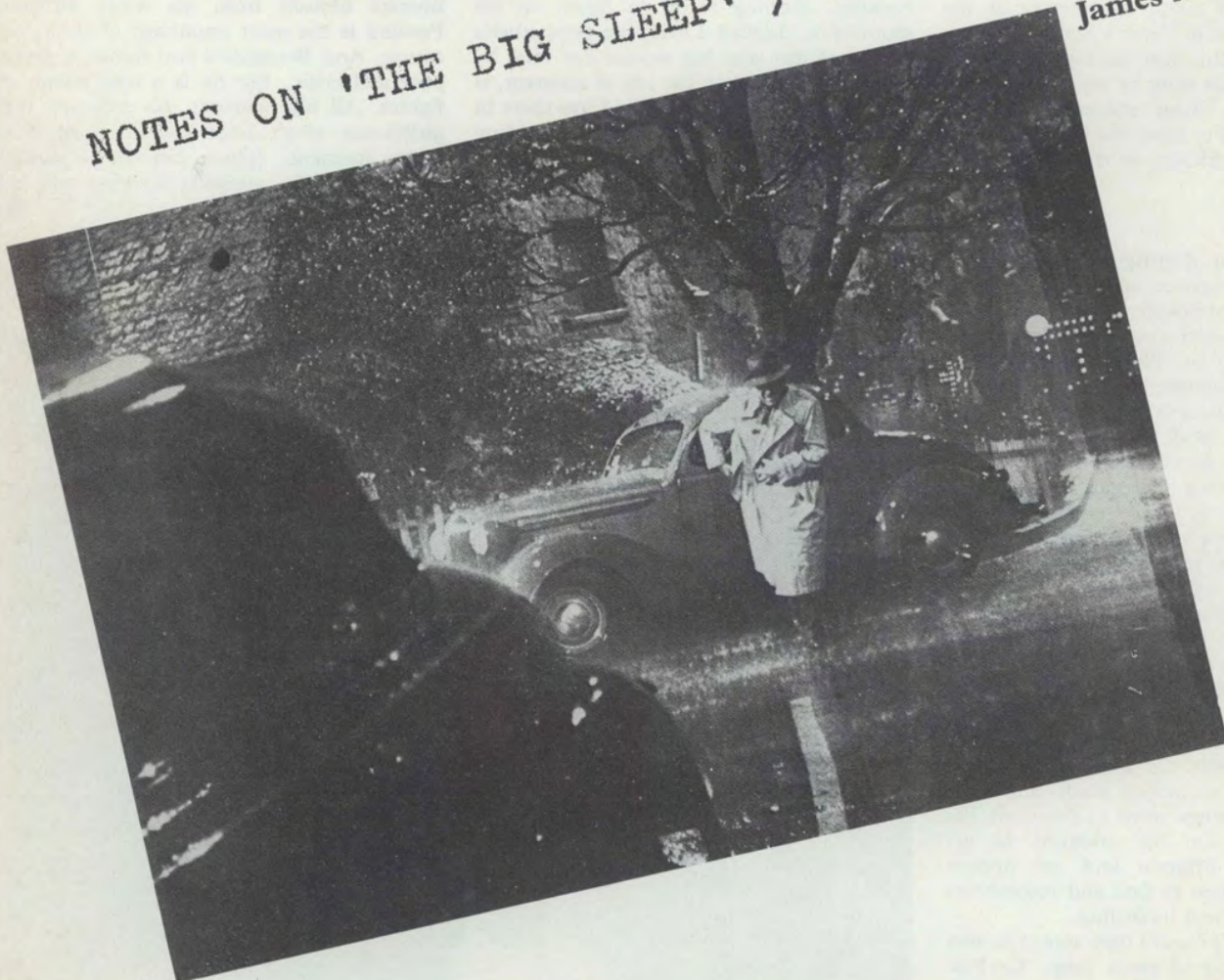
Bernardo Bertolucci. Photograph by Deborah Beer





NOTES ON 'THE BIG SLEEP' / Thirty Years After

James Monaco



The heat is wet, suffocating and unbearable. Philip Marlowe is being interviewed by old General Sternwood in the second scene of *The Big Sleep*. With a sardonic, faint smile that Marlowe appreciates, the old man explains the hothouse atmosphere in which they are meeting: 'You are looking at a very dull survival of a rather gaudy life, a cripple paralysed in both legs and with only half of his lower belly. There's very little that I can eat and my sleep is so close to waking that it is hardly worth the name. I seem to exist largely on heat, like a newborn spider, and the orchids are an excuse for the heat.'

Marlowe is sweating profusely. He removes his jacket. The shirt sticks in patches to his skin. He sips at the brandy the General insists he drink. The General wants to know more about him. 'There's very little to tell. . . I went to college once and can still speak English if there's any demand for it. There isn't much in my trade. . . ' Diffident, sardonic, quietly oppressed by the perfunctory imperfection of the lives they lead, Marlowe and General Sternwood are a match for each other. They share two qualities: a disdainful, ironic sense of the fetid world that surrounds them and a dogged persistence which keeps the General alive in his hothouse and Marlowe sane in the equally morbid world outside.

From that first exquisitely played scene between Marlowe and Sternwood right on through, the mood and tenor of *The Big Sleep* are quintessential 'private eye'. There are other examples of the genre which might now be more popular, but Howard Hawks' film is the fullest, richest and most resonant. No wonder, then, that interest in it has renewed and intensified now, almost thirty years later. There was something about the feel of those 1940s private eye films—and *The Big Sleep* most of all—that we find strangely attractive in the 1970s.

A year ago Robert Altman translated Marlowe into contemporary terms in *The Long Goodbye*. More recently, Robert Towne has fashioned a knowing and loving homage to Chandler's hero (and specifically to *The Big Sleep*) in *Chinatown*. In both these recent films the emotional and philosophical raw materials are vividly reminiscent of their predecessor. Los Angeles—seedy, decaying, slow and hot—is the setting; the mood is depressive, sardonic, almost languorous; and, most importantly, the human relationships are superficial, abrupt and eventually seen as incontrovertible evidence of a pervasive and deep-rooted corruption of the spirit. Towne's *Chinatown* script has been applauded for its introduction of a political dimension into the private eye genre; as J. J. Gittes finds out, the root of the trouble lies in the economic realities of the Los Angeles water system, seemingly the dullist of municipal politics. Yet Chandler's original novel also has political roots—in oil rather than water—and it was only the studio's sense of what was permissible that prohibited the film version from dealing with those roots.

In any event, although *Chinatown* may be more politically explicit than was Hawks' film, what really matters in this genre is the mood that is communicated. In all three of these films the sickly heat of the inaptly named City of Angels plays a central part in the imagery. As Bogart, Nicholson and Gould stand fully suited in the smoggy sun, wiping their respective brows and wincing at the decay which surrounds them and threatens to overwhelm them, we are brought back again and again to the image of the hothouse with which *The Big Sleep* begins: 'an overgrown garden, rank with

weeds.' Like that earlier detective, Hamlet, Marlowe in his various incarnations and J. J. Gittes are blessed with a sad knowledge that something is rotten, politically, that the offence is rank and smells to heaven. Like Hamlet, they also are passive observers rather than energetic actors; they seldom take the initiative and, if they are motivated by a kind of dogged determination that we secretly admire, they nevertheless seem to think they have to apologise for it.

Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe was the epitome of the existential hero of the late Thirties and early Forties, who managed to triumph by sheer force of spirit and persistence over that peculiar ennui which pervaded the period and which now we find curiously nostalgic. One wonders if Sartre had read Chandler. Matthieu Delerue, the hero of his trilogy *Les Chemins de la Liberté*, bears a certain psychic resemblance to Marlowe (no one but Bogart could have played Delerue if a film version of the novels had been made at the time); indeed, the atmosphere of enervating heat is also central to *L'Age de la Raison*, the first novel of the trilogy. (On the other hand, one also wonders if Chandler had Joseph Conrad's narrator in mind when he named his detective.)

The literary spoor of Philip Marlowe leads to some strange and interesting places, but it's best to keep clearly in mind that the film *The Big Sleep* was a rare conjunction of talents. If Chandler's protagonist has symbolic value today, part of the reason is because Humphrey Bogart played him—and gave him life. Other actors have essayed the role, of course, but we don't think of George or Robert Montgomery or Dick Powell or James Garner when Marlowe's name is mentioned: it's Bogart's sad, laconic face that springs immediately to mind. He, alone, was the Hollywood icon of that Forties' existential hero that Chandler described in prose. Certainly, *The Big Sleep* ranks as one of the seminal films in Bogart's career.

It is also very likely the central focus of the long career of Howard Hawks, often called the 'most American' of directors. Hawks, like Hollywood in general, reflected the American culture of the Thirties, Forties and Fifties so well just because he chose not to comment upon it. We may watch Hitchcock to revel in the existential poetry he finds lurking behind the American

dream, and we may look at Ford to share his admiration for the history and romance of that dream, but Hawks gives us a much better sense of the unconscious cultural attitudes we held towards the national mythos during the decades in which he made his best films. In a sense, he can be seen as leader of the phalanx of Hollywood artisans: William Wellman and Raoul Walsh (among many others) ride together with Hawks—Wellman to the left of him, Walsh to the right—but more often than not Hawks is clearly the leader. If he doesn't make the first film of a genre, then he makes the best—the most classic or representative. And coming fifteen years after his landmark gangster films (*The Criminal Code*, *Scarface*), five years after his equally inventive 'screwball' comedies (*Twentieth Century*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *His Girl Friday*) and a decade or two before the great Westerns at the end of his career (*Rio Bravo*, *Eldorado*, *Rio Lobo*), *The Big Sleep* is something like the ultimate Hawks film. It is a summary of his world which depends equally on the wit and tone of the earlier comedies and the harsh, existential mood of the gangster films, and which seems to balance them dialectically.

But *The Big Sleep* is also a meeting place for many other talents, trends, styles and attitudes. Few films come so close to weaving a rich tapestry from the many and various strands of the Hollywood mythos. We are talking now about a very precisely defined period of film history, from the invention of the talkies to the advent of television. So *The Big Sleep* (1946) comes close to the end of twenty years of Hollywood supremacy, and summarises it. It's not only one of Humphrey Bogart's most representative films but Hawks' second try at the Bogart-Bacall combination (*To Have and Have Not* immediately preceded it), and as such has a special relevance in the history of Hollywood's sexual politics. Finally, if the Western is still the great American genre, the detective story nevertheless holds a very special place in the genre landscape: it was and still is a very pointed metaphor for American reality, combining its inherent paranoia and existential isolation with the deep-rooted desire to make sense out of a puzzling set of data and to bring order out of cultural and ethical chaos. Bogart's popularity in the 1960s was no camp accident: the persona he created in more than seventy films spoke to a specific and deeply felt need in the generation that followed his; and nowhere, perhaps, was that persona more clearly etched than in his portrayal of Raymond Chandler's equally resonant Philip Marlowe.

If *The Big Sleep* gives us the classic Bogart, and if the film shows its roots in earlier Hawks successes in both gangster films and Thirties comedies (there is even a musical sequence for Bacall), then remember that the peculiar tone of the film, its downbeat visual style and its dark images, also forecast the films *noirs* that were to follow and which comprised the last of the great Hollywood genres.

Suffice it to say that a lot of things are happening in *The Big Sleep*: they may be unintentional, but they are no less evident for that. The point is, simply, that Hawks' film is something like a nodal point in the tide that was Hollywood. By chance (and a bit by design) a number of little waves and

Left: 'The Big Sleep'. Bogart among the orchids in General Sternwood's hothouse; the landscape of Chandlertown

a couple of major ones reach crests here at the same point and reinforce each other.

If there is a key to the famous dizzy logic of *The Big Sleep*, I think it probably lies in the recognisably classic structure of the film. As with all genres worthy of that appellation, there are some rather explicit rules which apply to the design of the 'private eye' film, and *The Big Sleep* mirrors them precisely. For example, only the crudest of detective stories relies on a single mystery; most of the best ones have a dual structure: a surface mystery (usually the client's) and a 'deep' mystery (the metaphysical or political problem which presents itself to the detective). This is very clearly the case with *The Big Sleep*. Marlowe has been hired by General Sternwood to find out why his nymphomaniac daughter Carmen is being blackmailed and to take care of the blackmailer once he is found. Secondly, we discover that the General is disturbed by having been seemingly betrayed by Sean Regan (who never appears in the film), who was once Sternwood's trusted aide and who has disappeared. Meanwhile, the General's elder daughter, Vivian (Bacall), is intrigued by Marlowe's presence. She assumes that the search for Regan is the main reason he has been hired by her father.

As an audience familiar with the conventions of the genre, we guess that the basic task set by the General for Marlowe is, like the surface explanations of psycho-analytical subjects, merely a reflection of the root cause of the General's anxiety. Marlowe of course knows this very well; like any good detective he's more interested in the 'deep' mystery than the surface puzzle. The first half of the film is devoted to the efficient solving of the client's problem. Marlowe discovers that the putative blackmailer, Arthur Gwynn Geiger, has been running a rather shoddy extortion racket and has been using his connections with Eddie Mars, a gambler, to mask the real nature of his business. He has lured Carmen into what were known in the 1940s as 'compromising situations', and photographed her. Yet Geiger is murdered just as Marlowe is about to confront him. Carmen is found at the scene of the crime and the case therefore takes on larger dimensions. Owen Taylor, the Sternwoods' chauffeur, is murdered next, but Marlowe can't fit this into the pattern he is developing. He next discovers that Geiger's employee, Agnes, and her accomplice, Joe Brody, hope to take over various of the late villain's shady enterprises.

So the focus has shifted, quickly, from Geiger to Agnes and Brody. As Marlowe confronts them, Carol Lundgren, another of Geiger's former employees (and his 'room-mate') rushes in and shoots Brody in revenge for the death of Geiger. Marlowe has also discovered that Eddie Mars is taking an unusual interest in the case. Vivian says this is because Sean Regan ran off with Eddie Mars' wife, but Marlowe reserves judgment. Nevertheless, by the middle of the film the danger of blackmail has passed (really no thanks to Marlowe), and Carmen's possible involvement in the murder of Geiger has been effectively covered up. As Vivian and her father see it, Marlowe's job is finished. But Marlowe doesn't think so. When he meets Vivian in



'A woman even more insolent than you. . .': Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall in 'The Big Sleep'

a restaurant for his pay-off he begins the second level of his investigation with the question: 'Let's begin with what Eddie Mars has on you.' It will become a recurrent refrain in the film.

It is at this point that things begin to get muddy, and there are good reasons for the famous illogic of the second half of *The Big Sleep*—most of them having to do with the Hollywood Production Code. The novel is much more explicit and pointed. But the mood is nevertheless conveyed by the film even if the specific politics of the novel aren't, and that is what counts most. As Marlowe tracks down the various tangled relationships among the Sternwood family (all three of them bound together by the tensions between them), Eddie Mars, and Agnes and her new accomplice Harry Jones (Elisha Cook, Jr.), it becomes painfully evident that there are no heroes here, only a kind of determinist sink in which, at various times, one group or another tempor-

arily scratches its way to the top, lying, cheating and stealing with more aplomb than the others.

On the one hand, the surface mystery: why is Carmen being blackmailed? On the other, the deep mystery: Let's begin with what Eddie Mars has on you—and by extrapolation, what you have on Eddie Mars, what you have on your father, what he has on your sister, what she has on you. . . This is the epitome of the 'private eye' movie. *Chinatown*, for example, exhibits the same dual-level structure: the surface mystery of the client is not the main focus of the film; the deep mystery—in this case profoundly political—is what counts. The intimations of incest are made explicit in *Chinatown* and, in a surprising reversal, the drugs and sex which are the matrix of the decadent atmosphere of *The Big Sleep* (explicitly in the novel, implicitly in the film) are replaced in the Seventies homage to the film by rather cold family and municipal politics. The nausea that Bogart-

Thirty years on: Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway as the private eye and the rich man's daughter in 'Chinatown'



Marlowe evinced in the Forties has become, by the Seventies, an axiom of our collective emotional existence. Gittes is not surprised so much by what he discovers lurking beneath the placid surface of sleepy Los Angeles. Instead, the focus of the later film is on the detective's inability to control events. Whereas Marlowe was able, eventually, to set up a denouement that satisfied, *Chinatown* is marked by a progressive sense of futility: Gittes' plans don't work and the denouement, if it can be called that, is a matter of *deus ex machina*, imposed on the story rather than growing organically from it.*

Gittes, it might be added, nevertheless comes a lot closer to the original Bogartian spirit of Marlowe than does Elliott Gould's parody of the character in *The Long Goodbye*. Gittes, it's true, is a bright-eyed, successful divorce shamus, with a sharp eye for the main chance, but he is also rather fresh-faced and naïve, so we can forgive him those un-Bogartian faults. *Chinatown* is, in a sense, his initiation rite, and we can expect that a sequel would reveal a more sombre J. J. Gittes, a man who then would share with his brother the Bogartian Marlowe the fearful knowledge that they are both very much alone in the hothouse of Los Angeles, that the legal system is 'inoperative' when it comes to big boys like Noah Cross, and that there isn't going to be anything like real justice. 'Not in this town,' as Chandler wrote, 'not in any town half this size, in any part of this wide, green and beautiful U.S.A. We just don't run our country that way.'

Gould's Marlowe, on the other hand, understands this as axiomatic; he is a child of the hip Sixties, after all. It is just because he accepts this knowledge that he can't convey the same sense of hurt and loneliness—and courage in the face of them—that made Bogart's Marlowe so eminently attractive. He is too hard, too sharp; much closer in atmosphere to Sam Spade than to Philip Marlowe. Setting *Chinatown* in the Thirties, Towne was free to give us an innocent, 'proto-Marlowe' hero. In a contemporary setting, Leigh Brackett and Robert Altman had to give us a 'post-Marlowe' parody.

In between *The Big Sleep* and its modern evocations in the 1970s, the genre had become degraded. During the 1950s the detective correlatives—Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* may be the best example—were marked by a vicious and righteous sense of retribution. The aim was not, as it had been in the Forties, to understand the phenomenon of cultural decay by working through the mystery, but to begin *in medias res*, at 'white heat', and wreak vengeance on the villainous products of that ecological sink. Only recently have we been able to rediscover the existential balance and self-respect that Bogart represented thirty years ago. Since that righteous sense of revenge that was born in the Fifties still greatly colours nearly all the examples of the genre that pervade American television, it is no surprise that Towne felt it necessary to set *Chinatown* in the period of the Thirties. We do not yet quite accept a Bogartian reserve in our heroes in the Seventies; we still

prefer the orgasmic, simplistic violence of Clint Eastwood and Charles Bronson.

Yet *The Big Sleep* still lives, its mythic resonances have not lost their appeal, and this means that the quasi-fascist detective story of the Fifties has not completely forced out the more balanced, thoughtful, consequential 1940s model. And as the epitome of a Howard Hawks movie, *The Big Sleep* exhibited all the varied facets of his technical dramatic skill. Scenes are edited sharply and economically, designed to give viewers all the necessary information and no more. Frames are composed with similar efficiency, organised around the action, focusing clearly on the characters and the interaction between them. But above all, *The Big Sleep* shows itself to be the quintessential Hawks film by the colour, precision and richness of its dialogue. The rapid fire delivery that had been the basis of the humour of the screwball comedies is mirrored here with greater subtlety of effect. Building on Raymond Chandler's already meaty, witty exchanges, screenwriters Faulkner, Brackett and Furthman further enriched the ore; Hawks and his actors refined it.

Like many of Howard Hawks' films, *The Big Sleep* is almost better to listen to than to watch.† Hawks was obsessed with gritty,



'The Big Sleep': Marlowe and Mars. 'I could make your business my business'

evocative, ironic dialogue. His favourite novelists were, he says, Hemingway, Hammett and Chandler. More than most directors he sought out and employed the most talented screenwriters, many of whom had had, like Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, considerable stage experience. Hawks has explained many times in interviews that he thinks the scene is the basic unit of film-making: do the scene well and audiences won't care about the rest. Talking about *The Big Sleep* he once said, 'We made a picture that worked pretty well... and I never figured out what was going on, but I thought the basic thing had *great scenes in it* and it was good entertainment' (my italics). What made those scenes work (and they are numberless: Marlowe and Sternwood in the hothouse, Marlowe and Vivian in his office, Marlowe and Mars at Geiger's house, for example) was the kind of dialogue that was so multi-layered that it could ring ironical changes on itself, at the same time that it was

conveying basic information about necessary details of character and plot.

Hawks was very much involved in this process. He made it a sort of game. He has described how he used to work with Hecht and MacArthur, for example: 'We'd sit in a room and we'd work for two hours and then we'd play backgammon for an hour. Then we'd start again and one of us would be one character and one would be another character. We'd read our lines of dialogue and the whole idea was to try and stump other people, to see if they could think of something crazier than you could. And that is the kind of dialogue we used, and the kind that was fun.' When the script was complete, Hecht and MacArthur thought they were finished. Hawks told them, 'We start again tomorrow.' 'On what?' they asked. 'Different ways of saying things.'

These procedures led to the richness and flavour that mark most of Hawks' great films. *The Big Sleep* is no exception: Marlowe's exchange with Mars when he first meets him,‡ his set speech of introduction for General Sternwood, the recurrent refrain with Vivian—indeed, all Bogart's verbal battles with Bacall—all are distilled rhetoric, the kind of dialogue that gets remembered and repeated. It is all carefully planned and polished material: it is the aesthetic focus of the film and it carries it. Outside of the Westerns, very few images from Hawks' films are striking; it is the dialogue we remember. More than anyone else, Hawks made 'talkies'. And that is why a Hawks film is more easily enjoyed by inexperienced audiences. You have to learn to *watch* films to enjoy to the fullest films as intellectually intriguing as Hitchcock's or as visually impressive as Ford's; but all you need is a minimal appreciation of fast language and smart badinage to like a talkie by Howard Hawks.

But what was all that talk about? Hawks is often noted for concentrating on male friendships and avoiding sexual relationships; certainly the early 'war' and gangster films and the later Westerns do so, perforce. But at the height of his career Hawks gave us some of the strongest women characters in American movies and, moreover, he placed them in positions of intellectual equality with their male counterparts. That the films are often comedies in which *both* the male and female leads are made to appear to some extent ridiculous shouldn't prevent us from noticing the balance Hawks achieved.

That sexual equation was most fascinating (and meaningful) in the Bogart-Bacall films. In fact, Hawks felt that the basic premise of *The Big Sleep* was not the mystery, not the figure of the private eye, but the tense and equal relationship between Humphrey Bogart and his 'discovery', Lauren Bacall. The genius of *The Big Sleep* was going to be the character of a woman 'even more insolent than you,' he told Bogart. It worked. Vivian Sternwood Rutledge is self-confident, sardonic and as cynical as Bogart's Marlowe. And Hawks has surrounded her with women

*This may be more Polanski's responsibility than Towne's; it appears that Towne had conceived quite a different ending for the film.

†Which is why satirists like the Firesign Theatre who work purely in audio can find so much valuable material in *The Big Sleep*. See (or rather hear) their *Further Adventures of Nick Danger* for an instructive parody of the film.

‡MARS: 'Is that any of your business?' MARLOWE: 'I could make it my business!' MARS: 'And I could make your business my business!' MARLOWE: 'You wouldn't want to. There's no money in it.'

foils who re-emphasise this major theme of *The Big Sleep*. Agnes, the front-woman in Geiger's bookstore, is one of the most active and persistent villains of the piece. Forced to work through men, she picks up and then discards first Joe Brody, then Harry Jones. Never, as she complains, can she find any one but a 'half-smart guy. That's all I ever draw. Never once a guy who's smart all the way round the course. Never once.' In a better world Agnes would be free to do her own deals, but in this one she is forced to find men to act through.

The woman in the bookstore across the street from Geiger's shop is equally forceful, in a more pleasant way. It is she who takes the initiative in her one gem of a scene with Philip Marlowe. 'I see . . .' she says, deftly removing her glasses, 'you begin to interest me.' She closes up shop as Marlowe breaks out his bottle of rye, and she enjoys the game every bit as much as he does. Even the taxi-driver whom Marlowe hires to tail Geiger's car is a woman, and she is expert at her job. Finally, Carmen is the closest foil to her sister Vivian; she shows us the



'The Big Sleep'. Bogart in two bookshops: with Agnes (Sonia Darrin) and with the girl across the street (Dorothy Malone)

darker side of the Sternwood character and she does it with considerable panache, never apologising for her actions, which if they were those of a male character would simply be put down to 'sowing some wild oats'.

Within four years after *The Big Sleep* was released, a violent if unconscious backlash set in, and women's roles in Hollywood films still haven't recovered from what we might call the 'Marilyn Monroe syndrome'. Unless we consider *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* as wholly ironic, or seize on Paula Prentiss' role in *Man's Favourite Sport*, we have to admit that Hawks mirrored this destructive development just as accurately as he had reflected the rise in power of women's roles in the late Thirties and early Forties. Still, *The Big Sleep* remains a gallery of women who are just as 'insolent', just as competent and often just as sublimely amoral as any of the men in the film, which makes it something of a high-water mark for women's roles in Hollywood.

Yet even as *The Big Sleep* reflects the best elements of the Hollywood style, it also

shows us why that style was becoming progressively effete. Despite all Hawks' humorous protestations, and our critical awareness of the communicative function of style in his films, the fact is that the story does count: what one says *is* as important as how one says it. Raymond Chandler's novel, compared with the film that was drawn from it, is a considerably more intriguing work in many respects. What could only be hinted at in a film made under the Production Code could be explicitly developed in an uncensored novel. To his discredit, Hawks not only had no reservations about the Code and its chilling effects but, when the Breen office didn't like Chandler's ending, he asked them jokingly to suggest one in place of it—liked it, and used it. 'I'll hire you fellows as writers,' he says he told them.

Chandler's *Big Sleep* is more specific about the facts of the organically decadent world in which Marlowe somehow survives. Carmen *did* murder Regan. (The film suggests this, then switches the blame breathlessly to Mars.) She is more evidently a nymphomaniac in the novel, and it is also clear that Geiger is running a pornographic bookshop and dealing in sex and drugs on the side; that Carol Lundgren is Geiger's lover (which gives Carol a motive for murdering Joe Brody); that Vivian's ex-husband was Regan (which makes the General's interest in him explicable); and that Carmen was fond of ether and laudanum cocktails. Much of the illogic of the film is simply due to cuts which were made in order to conform to the Code. (Although not all the murkiness is the result of the script: when it occurred to Hawks and his cast in the middle of shooting that nobody had the slightest idea who killed Owen Taylor, the Sternwood chauffeur, they called Chandler. He didn't know either.)

Most important, however, is the excision of what was for Chandler obviously a very significant subplot. He devotes several chapters to Marlowe's relationship with the police and the district attorney's office, in which he makes it painfully clear that one of Marlowe's main motives for being a *private* detective is that the *public* detectives are pretty thoroughly corrupt. After Marlowe has 'solved' the first mystery (who killed Geiger and Brody and why), Chandler spends a chapter explaining how the story was finally released to the press: a complete fabrication meant to protect the Sternwood family, who obviously own a share in the L.A. police. (In *Chinatown*, incidentally, Noah Cross' daughter tells Gittes that her father 'owns the police'.) The second half of the book then makes more sense. Marlowe has the best of motives for sticking with the case: he may be cynical, but he is also infuriated about the fictions the police invent for the public and about the special relationship between the Sternwoods and the cops. In short, there is a sharp political point to Raymond Chandler's novel which is thoroughly blunted in Hawks' film. It would be nearly three decades before Hollywood's ethos would change enough to allow these politics in *Chinatown*.

Ironically, but all too significantly, the ending the Production Code people suggested was much more violent than Chandler's political conclusion. In this sense, as well, *The Big Sleep* is an accurate epitome

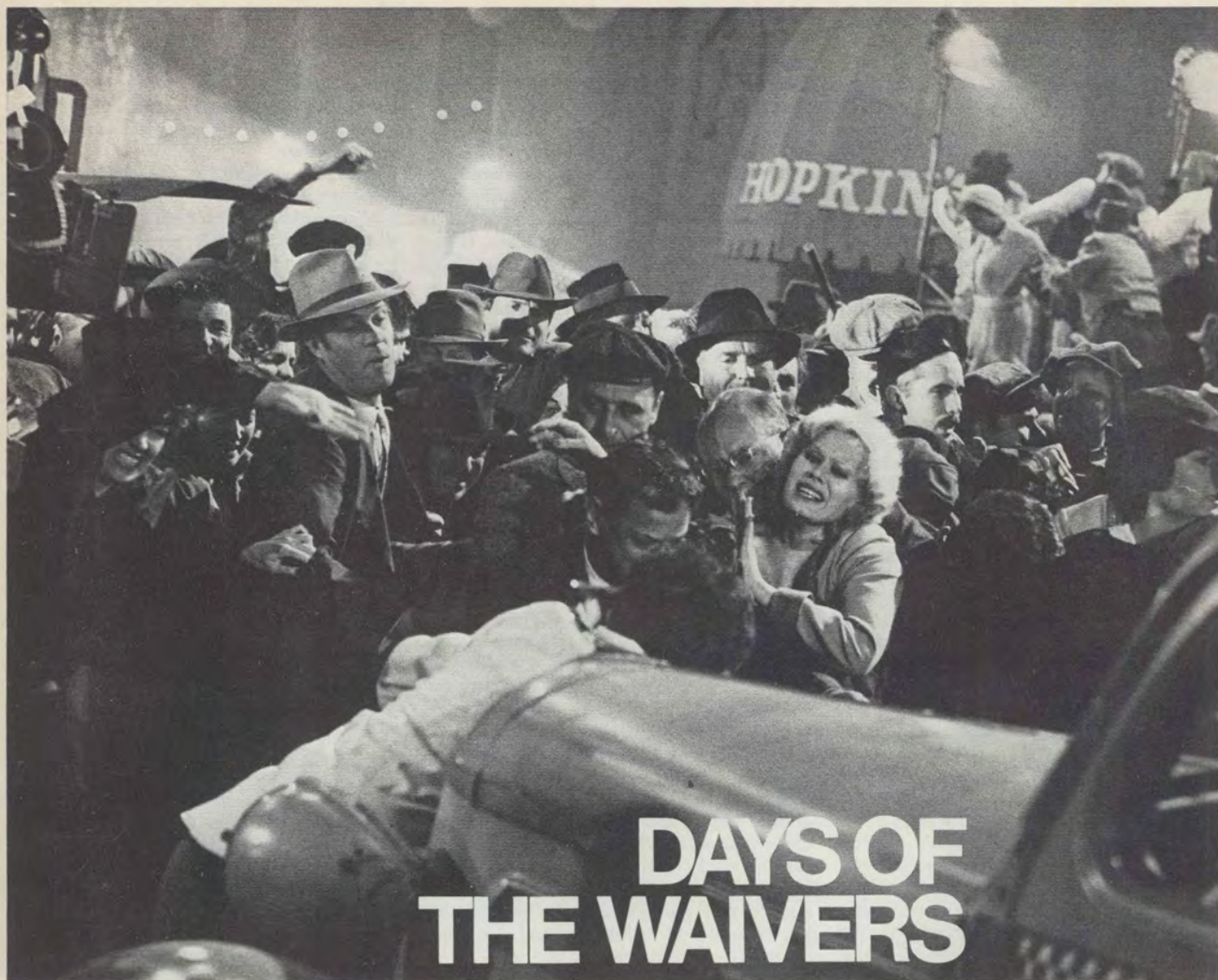
of Hollywood movies: when the film-makers allowed themselves to be censored, when they eagerly learned the lesson that a commodity like violence could be more commercially valuable than a commitment to political realities, they were offering themselves up smiling for emasculation. That is the ultimate failure of Hollywood, and probably of Howard Hawks as well.

Yet despite these failures, because it is a kind of second-generation screwball comedy; because it is the ultimate Bogart-Bacall film; because it has some relatively advanced sexual politics; because it is a classic private-eye film; because it prefigures the *film noir* of the next decade; and because it is a concentrated model of Howard Hawks' stylish storytelling, *The Big Sleep* is a landmark film. It is 'good, clean, direct, functional cinema' (to quote Andrew Sarris' comment on Hawks) but it is also a major example of the intriguing and vital resonances that the 'craft' could produce during the best years of the Hollywood style.

When Noël Coward, no slouch at writing dialogue himself, asked Hawks what he called the kind of dialogue he used, Hawks replied: 'Hemingway calls it "oblique dialogue". I call it three-cushion.' The implied comparison with Hemingway and the sports metaphor which Hawks uses to refer to his own work are both significant. (It's also no accident that the best film version of a Hemingway book is still Hawks' *To Have and Have Not*.) They shared a way of looking at the world—and responding to it—which represents a whole set of American cultural attitudes, a set which is still current in the Seventies, even if we associate it more closely with the roles Bogart played thirty years ago.

The aesthetic device that both Hemingway and Hawks found most evocative of that Bogartian attitude towards the world was 'oblique, three-cushion dialogue.' It reflects a world of isolation and indirection, of closed spaces and mistaken purposes, in which pain is chronic, but often treated with defensive irony; a world of actions rather than feelings, in which professions and jobs are important because they are the first line of defence against the pervasive anxiety; a world of journeys to be made, races to be run, duties to be met. It is almost as though both Hawks and Hemingway themselves hid behind their technique, just as their characters use their expertise as a shield against the meaninglessness through which they daily walk.

No doubt the pain of the irony is more apparent in Hemingway, but there is a smell of it always in Hawks' work as well. And that existential odour gives his movies—especially *The Big Sleep*—a pungency and dimension that they would not otherwise have. No doubt Howard Hawks will be best remembered as the ultimate Hollywood craftsman. Yet there is a thin but vital strain which makes his films much more than the jewelled, efficiently functioning storytelling machines that they evidently are. Sometimes the emptiness shows through the cracks in the bright laughter; sometimes the breathless dialogue stops cold and the people are left bare of that protective shell. Very seldom, but sometimes. ■



DAYS OF THE WAIVERS

Andrew Meyer

'The Day of the Locust': riot at the premiere

Out of the woodwork they came; from unemployment offices, from senior citizens' homes, from acting classes. Some had friends 'in the business' and had hung around the studios for years; to others the world of movie-making was as strange and awesome as the workings of the Kremlin. They were sought out and chosen by the Independent Casting Office of Paramount Studios for a scene from *The Day of the Locust*: the climactic scene, in which a restless crowd of people waiting for movie stars to arrive at a Hollywood premiere suddenly breaks out into an angry and violent mob. 850 extras were required. The first 125 had to be from the roster of S.E.G., the Screen Extras Guild. The rest could be *waivers*, amateurs for whom guild regulations had been waived. The word was sent out to the unemployment offices, and friends started spreading the word to friends.

The novel *The Day of the Locust* was written about the underbelly of Hollywood that Nathanael West observed in the late Thirties. He described the lonely and the lunatics and the grotesques, those who had come to the coast in search of careers in the movies and found disillusionment, those who had come to retire in the sunshine and found boredom. In the 1970s the sidewalks of Hollywood Boulevard are still dotted with fake cowboys, ex-clowns, dwarfs and religious fanatics. Although the tradition of the Hollywood premiere is fading, events such as the Oscar telecast, when hundreds of fans wait to watch the stars arrive, prove that the restless and sometimes demonic energy of dreamers is still there, waiting to

be tapped. Many of those chosen as extras were, in fact, the 1974 counterparts to the locusts that West had described. Or those very same people aged 36 years.

I had heard about the shooting from a friend working on the production and responded to the casting call eagerly. For me, it was a rare opportunity to see a crowd scene shot on a studio set—one of the few large-scale productions being made any more right in Hollywood. The director was John Schlesinger, the cinematographer was Conrad Hall, and I was to learn a good deal from observing the working methods of these two professionals. However, my confrontations with the 849 other extras were ultimately more involving and enlightening.

It was a matter of learning about people over and against learning about movies.

The first morning of shooting was damp and overcast. The line of waivers waiting for the opening of the studio gates at 8 a.m. looked not unlike a bread line on skid row. Many of the men were unshaven and seemed to have grabbed their clothes out of the laundry hamper. Women had made no attempt to do anything with their hair since it was about to be done for them. Not many people knew what the film was to be about, but since they had been to costume fittings the day before they did know that it was supposed to take place in the 1930s. Younger men had had their long hair and sideburns shorn. Older people had come with whatever 1930s clothing they had retained throughout the years and could still fit into.

The dressing room, make-up room and waiting area for the extras was Stage 27. An empty sound stage is a cavernous thing, with walls stretching up 42 feet high and a ground floor area of 10,688 square feet. At the same time it was claustrophobic; there were no windows, the doors were surrounded by partitions and the only lighting came from unshaded lightbulbs hanging from the ceiling. Only several rows of hard benches were available for seating, as the extras were costumed, made up and sent out to wait.

The exhilaration of being in a movie was

severely dampened for some. 'It's like my worst adolescent nightmare,' said one distraught girl as an ugly hat was pulled down over her ears. Girls who had visualised 'Thirties' fashions as the Bonnie-and-Clyde look were dismayed to find themselves looking more like Marie Dressler characters. Eyebrows were darkened and cheeks made redder. Everyone was made to look as dowdy and drab as possible. I was reminded that attractive clothing for the lower middle classes is a comparatively recent development. Yet many of the older women felt strangely comfortable wearing and seeing worn the clothes they had grown up with, clothes which were reassuring to eyes that had grown bewildered with the recent manic and extreme changes of fashion; while older men felt long forgotten urges come alive again seeing girls wearing what used to be considered sexy—such as stockings rolled up under the knee and held in place by garters. So there were special treats here for the extras who were over forty. Their youth was being authenticised; their nostalgia was being indulged.

'What beautiful old cars! It's worth doing this just to see these old cars.'... 'They even put down a real sidewalk here.'... 'It looks as big as the real Grauman's.' After hours of waiting, the set was finally ready for shooting over on Stage 32, across the alley. The extras walked through the entrance like children coming down on Christmas morning.

An impressive set it certainly was; a life-size reconstruction of Grauman's Chinese Theatre as it would have appeared in 1938, complete with footprints in cement. Over the canopy was a 10-foot electric sign announcing the film being premiered, *The Buccaneer*, a DeMille swashbuckler that starred Fredric March. Bleachers for the spectators were set up on either side of a red carpet. A replica of the entire intersection of Orange Drive with Hollywood Boulevard had been constructed. Next to the theatre was a flower shop. Across the street were a dry cleaner's, a coffee shop (fitted out with such details as a period juke box and a jar of licorice) and a real estate office. A magazine rack on Orange Drive had been supplied with 1930s copies of *Life* and *Saturday Evening Post*. The street was lined with Rolls-Royces and other 1938 models all looking sparkling new.

The first piece of action to be blocked out was the arrival of the stars and studio executives. Look-alikes had been chosen and dressed to impersonate Merle Oberon, Ginger Rogers, Tyrone Power, Marlene Dietrich and Dick Powell (by Dick Powell, Jr.). On the word 'action' a limousine would stop before the theatre and a 'movie star' would alight, to be greeted by a chorus of exploding flashbulbs. The fans, grouped on all four corners of the intersection, were told to wave, scream, push forward and plead for autographs. Pencils and autograph books were distributed among the extras along with oranges and boxes of popcorn.

'Hey, fans, isn't this the most exciting premiere you've ever been to,' cried out Nancee Lafayette as part of her Ginger Rogers routine. The crowd of extras roared in response. 'I just love premieres! I adore old C.B.,' she continued, with the faintest

trace of sarcasm in her voice. Nancee was familiar with movie fan enthusiasm. Her regular job was that of a tour guide at Universal Studios. The M.C., Bill Baldwin, knew his job well. He had been Jack Benny's radio announcer for years and had been M.C. at the 1939 World's Fair.

'Ordinarily you never get a chance to scream your head off like this,' remarked one enthusiastic waiver. 'You can't do it in the house; the neighbours will complain. If you did it in the street you'd be arrested. This is a splendid opportunity to do all the screaming and shouting you've wanted to do for so long.'

'This is what a movie premiere really used to be like,' reminisced the exotic and beautiful Movita, ex-wife of Marlon Brando. Forty years earlier she had attended a similar premiere—for the original version of *Mutiny on the Bounty* in which she played opposite Clark Gable. Now she was walking the red carpet clad in chinchilla, supposedly a studio executive's wife.

Yetta, a short blonde woman bustling with energy, improvised a bit of action that Schlesinger enthusiastically decided to use. She would dart through the Hollywood Boulevard traffic right up to the stars' limousines to get their autographs. This is what she had actually done when she first came out to Hollywood in 1932. In the intervening years she had sung in choruses, danced with folk groups, got married and attended Valley State College, where she appeared in some student films before her recent graduation. 'This could be my big break!' she exclaimed while doing a Clara Bow pose for one of the still photographers who had singled her out for a short session. Her flushed face and girlish grin insisted that her capacity to enjoy life had not been drained by her dreams and hopes.

The following morning, and for the next few days, the waivers showed up bright and early, 7 a.m. for the women and 8 a.m. for the men. Those who had had less than total enthusiasm for and interest in the goings-on had simply chosen not to return. There was already a line of 'stand-by' waivers outside the studio gates to replace them. But for those who had hung around Hollywood for decades waiting for a chance, this might have been the first job on which they cared about being on time. Almost all of them showed up punctually, though they could have got away with straggling in late.

'My husband was afraid of my coming down here to act—it's a different world to him,' said Dorothea, a tall redhead who had not performed since her last appearance on the stage in Germany before the war. 'He's afraid they're going to ask me to go to Spain for four weeks. He doesn't understand that I'm just standing here in the middle of a crowd. But I like doing this. Otherwise I'd just be in the house all day with nothing to do but talk to the dog and the cat. Here you have company, you see interesting things.'

Most of the waivers were, like Dorothea and Yetta, coming to Paramount for love rather than money. Some older people were on pensions or social security and a lot of the younger people were collecting unemployment cheques. They were coming to Paramount primarily out of curiosity and genuine devotion to the movies. Their long, spare days were finally filled with exciting

events to describe to their husbands, their families and their friends each night. The Screen Extras Guild members, on the other hand, were completely professional about it all. To them it was only a day's pay, albeit a good deal more pay than the waivers were getting.

Being an extra of any kind isn't easy work, and most of the time is spent waiting around in discomfort. On the *Locust* set that meant waiting together while pressed tightly into groups or sitting down on the kerbs of sidewalks or on the dashboards of cars or on the wheels of the camera dolly. It meant breathing the exhaust fumes wafted through the sound stage from the idling cars. And so, while waiting on these false streets littered with real crushed popcorn and orange peel, the extras passed the time by talking to one another. Susie, a young Jesus freak, an attractive girl with very dark, lost eyes, always carried a copy of the Bible to the set and read passages from it aloud to her friends between takes. During the shooting she made friends with some more traditional believers with whom she had discussions about how their sinful lives had changed since finding religion. There were racetrack devotees who exchanged information loudly and excitedly. A group of middle-aged women exchanged stories about how they had each been mugged on the street at one time or another, and on the merits of various portable burglar alarms. Health food addicts discussed different combinations of vitamins and protein drinks. An ageing Swedish stripper handed out nude photographs of herself, to the distress of the religious contingent.

There were older people who had memories of Gloria Swanson and Erich von Stroheim and who had been paid a dollar a day as extras in Mary Pickford films. Most of them would come out of retirement whenever there was a film such as this with a big cast on which they could meet old friends and exchange memories. 'Listen, honey,' one of them said to a young film buff. 'I've done everything except the one thing I really wanted to do. I never played a cowboy. I once played a Cuban, all dressed up in a big sombrero, but I never played a cowboy.'

The most experienced of the extras was Tom, who had started his career as a comedian on the Borscht belt. His Yiddish twang was heard throughout the set as he described his experiences travelling around the world, working in Westerns made in Spain and musicals made in Israel. 'I don't know why Max von Sydow put on that accent in *The Exorcist*,' I heard him saying. 'He had the most beautiful English in *Hawaii*. I was on that show, you know, and I got a chance to talk to him. We talked about metaphysics and seventh seals. The rest of the company was wondering what the hell he was doing talking to a mere extra. Hell, who do they think he is? He's not God! Why can't he talk to me?'

Bill Baldwin made a point of introducing one of the better known extras, Eugene Jackson, a short black man who had been 'Pineapple' in the *Our Gang* comedies. His appearance was always deceptive, dressed as a Grauman's Chinese Theatre usher in a Chinaman's uniform with pigtail. He brought his saxophone to the set and occasionally played backstage between scenes or

during the lunch hour, when most of the waivers took their home-made lunches wherever they could find a peaceful spot on the lot; on a deserted Western street where Tom Doniphon once shot Liberty Valance, on the steps of a New York tenement where the Godfather ruled or on the lawn of a make-believe high school. In these privileged moments they had the choice of a whole range of settings in which to indulge their fantasies.

'Now remember, folks, there's an element of violence here,' explained assistant director Charlie Ziarko. 'The police are going to try to deter you and you can overrun them.' The cue was the arrival of 'Dolores del Rio' in a limousine. As soon as she was announced, the crowd were supposed to turn their heads towards the middle of the intersection, where Homer Simpson, played by Donald Sutherland, was being attacked and carried through the streets by an angry mob. They were instructed to rush over and join in.

They pushed against the cars and tram-

getting totally involved in the violence.

One little man became notorious. Before each take he would focus on some poor unsuspecting woman and on the word 'action' would throw her down and send her hat flying. Later on a group of his victims got together and in the next take threw him down and tore his clothes off. 'This is not a boxing match, folks!' announced an assistant director over the loudspeaker, as things started going too far. 'Please don't hit or throw eggs. We don't want anyone hurt. Remember that you are all real people!'

In fact, the waivers did become more serious and subdued as the action being staged got rougher and rougher. Wave upon wave of people were to be thrown against the cars while kicking, screaming and crying. Men were to be knocked down bleeding and women to clamber to the car tops to escape. Stunt men and women who could jump, fall and get pushed without being hurt became prominent. Among them were the Effers sisters, daughters of a whole family of stunt

even get himself a piece of ass. Then one day this old actor comes by selling silver polish and has a heart attack right there in the guy's place. The guy hears somebody crying outside his door and goes out to see that it's the old actor's daughter who's been standing out there all along. Ridiculous! And this is how good a movie they're making out of that crummy shtick of a book.'

'This film will make millions,' an old man said to a group standing outside the stage in the sunshine. 'It's got to make millions,' replied one of them. 'Especially with each of us going to see it two or three times.' I pondered the irony implicit in this interchange. These waivers were making \$25 a day for appearing in a crowd scene. They would spend that money (or at least a part of it) going again and again to see themselves flicker on the screen. But why not? Many of them had spent years in Hollywood struggling to make a career for themselves in the shadows of the successes scored by others more talented, more aggressive or just plain luckier. Those few seconds on the screen were more important to them than a lead role in a film for many a major star. Those few seconds were all they had to certify their existence.

The seventh day was the last on which most of the waivers were to be used. The last shot was taking a long time to set up and everyone was left waiting in big, barren Stage 27. A microphone was set up and Eugene Jackson started entertaining the waiting waivers with his saxophone. Nancee Lafayette, still wearing her silky red Ginger Rogers evening gown, crooned a torch song. A couple of others who had night club experience followed suit. Soon everyone was dancing, the young with the old, the would-be's with the has-beens, the Christian Scientists with the strippers.

The culmination was a community sing of *Let Me Call You Sweetheart*. The song sounded happy but there were undertones of despair. Older folk would soon go back to talking to their cats and wandering in the parks. Younger people would be back to the struggle of finding an agent or a job. Eugene asked everyone to take down his phone number in case one knew of a party requiring the services of a saxophonist.

On all previous days there had been a rush to the dressing room when shooting was finished. On this last day everyone took his time. Costumes were hung methodically and neatly; some took away a hat or a scarf as souvenirs. People exchanged phone numbers that would never be used. In another month the whole experience would pass out of their immediate consciousness like a dream.

And so next year all the waivers will go to see the film and anxiously look for their own faces in the crowd on the screen. As they look for themselves they will see the faces of the others they had talked to for hours on the set, people they had had intimate conversations with and then forgotten. They will wonder whether some of those other people are still alive, still living in Los Angeles, still working or since retired. They will wonder whether those others might yet achieve the dreams that once brought them out to the land of popcorn and oranges.



'The Day of the Locust': John Schlesinger and Donald Sutherland on the Hollywood street set

pled on each other's feet. They pushed past the S.E.G. policemen who were hitting them with rubber billy-clubs. Even the sixty-year-olds were showing more spunk and gumption than one would have thought possible. It was a chance to yell, to shove, to let out all your aggression. For some it was a football game; the signal from the assistant director was like the whistle before a scrimmage and getting to the other side of the street was like trying to score a touchdown. Many of the waivers started rehearsing and improvising their own little scenes; men knocking each other down and women duelling with their purses. Acting was becoming child's play. 'Hey, you wanna help us fight one of those cops?' a short Italian waiver turned to ask me. 'We're gonna tackle that S.E.G. cop over there. We've got three guys now and we need a fourth!' The more professional S.E.G. members, well versed in the art of faking a polished push, started getting annoyed at these amateurish waivers who only knew how to do the real thing and who were

artists who simply transplanted their in-family feuds to the sound stage.

A member of the make-up department became familiar as the 'blood man'. Before each take he would walk through the crowd with his plastic bottle and apply the sticky red fluid artistically to the faces of the various 'wounded'. Having a dribble of this imitation blood on their foreheads was like a badge of honour to many of the waivers. They would refuse to wash it off each night and would wear it home to show to their families. While driving home, one of them was stopped by a policeman who thought she had been in an accident and needed help. The element of violence authenticated the drama of the film to many of the waivers, as the old clothes had authenticated the reality. Something important seemed to be going on that they were all a part of.

Back in the dressing room I heard a man who had just started reading *Day of the Locust* describing the novel to his friends: 'It's just about a miserable motherfucker who lives in Hollywood all alone; can't

RAOUL WALSH:

'He used to be a big shot'

Manny Farber

The recent large-scale Raoul Walsh retrospective, first at the 1974 Edinburgh Festival and then at the NFT, has stimulated renewed interest in this prolific Hollywood veteran. Two years ago, we published an interview with Walsh by James Childs. Here, we reprint one of the most vigorous and perceptive pieces written on the director. We are grateful for permission to reprint Manny Farber's article, which was first published in the November 1971 issue of *Artforum*.

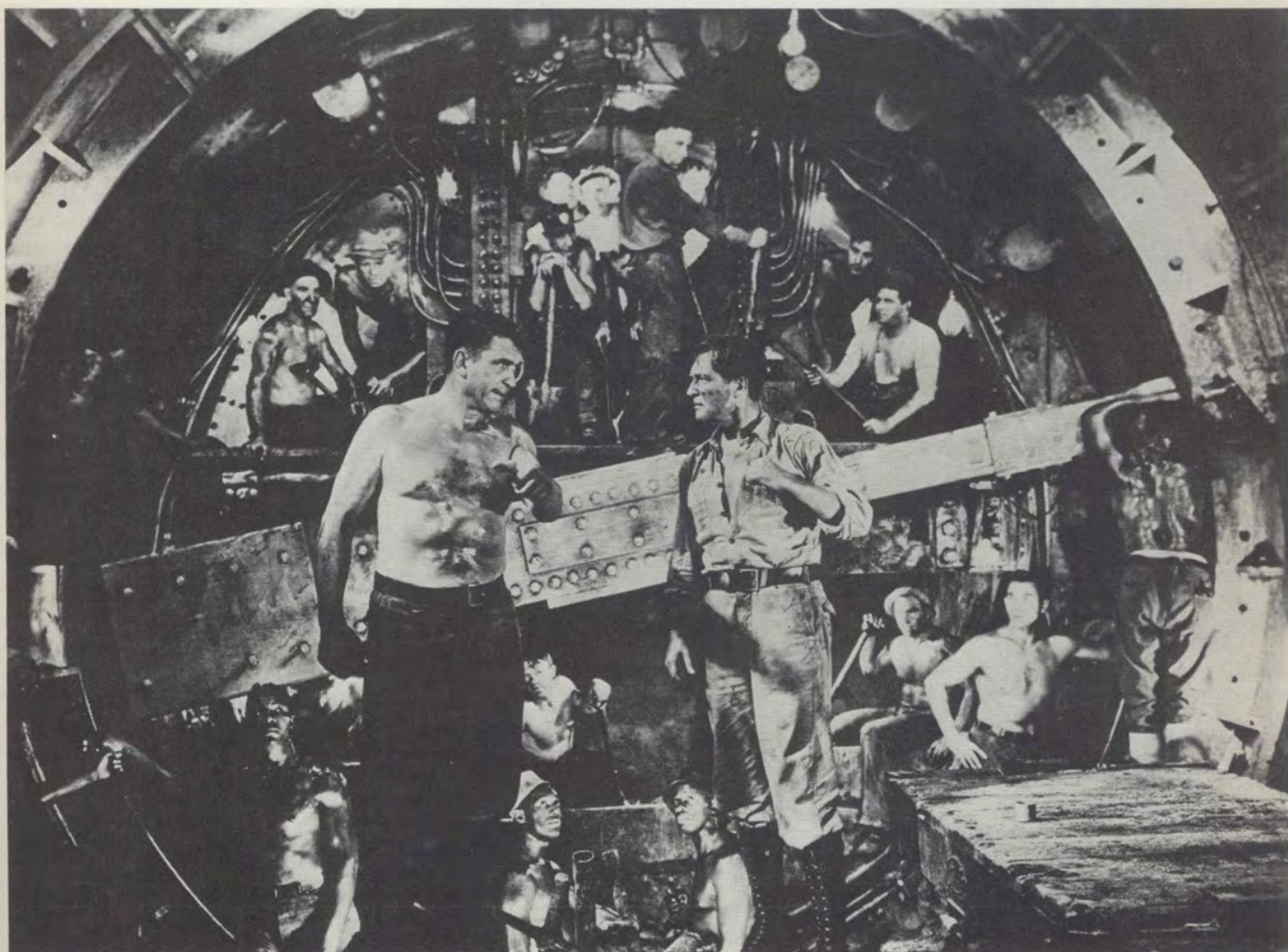
Often during the heyday of the Zanuck-Cohn-Mayer studio warlords, metaphorical approximations of the studio set-up appeared in film after film. In the depression highlife movies—*Holiday* and *Easy Living*—the studio is a corpulent rich man's silvery baroque mansion, the studio employees are a giddy loquacious parasitic family that chews up his wallet. In the *Shane-Red River* mythic westerns a cattle baron, chairbound Ryker or Tom Dumbson, functions as though he's running a movie studio by driving men and cattle into broken-willed obedience. Half of the Capra-Sturges library is involved with family-town-legislature made up of two-faced Edward Arnold smoothies or bombastic bosses, notable in Sturges for incompetence and pudgy cheeks, who mislead a population of angling gullible eccentrics. Raoul Walsh is one of the most enigmatic directors to unconsciously play around with this metaphor about the sick, compromising situation of working inside a big studio monolith. In Walsh's world there's no omnipotent kingpin character, but the bustling studio environment is recreated in a script that moves around a lot through rooms, cars, streets.

Unlike the evangelistic hymns or hums in which a Shane, Congressman Smith, or Matthew Garth acts as a saviour figure, standing for the director, who frees the prisoners from the institutional behaviour, Mad Dog Earle and his director are ostriches with their heads buried deep inside the System; they'll never 'crash out'. This director never walshes out, but stays inside a disingenuous script, accepts the inflexible requirement of at least three big stars acting out a measly story, also the stable of boisterous, bathetic, Irish Soul bit players (Frank McHugh, Hale, Bond, Arthur Shields, Joe Sawyer) who appear the same debilitating way every Walsh picture, and the all-purpose Warner's backlot, like Nervi trying to reach the sky, with mysterious,

all-white, slanted abutments, which could be a brewery, Nazi munitions factory, chemical plant, or penitentiary wall.

Reflecting the suffocating, man-under-a-toadstool relationship with Warners, he uses family-institutional-industrial frameworks for his stories, emphasises the burden of team responsibility and loyalty, tightly frames the space covered by plucky, full-bodied actors. The meat-and-potatoes of a Walsh film is the sense of a busy day at the factory, where the workers hustle this way and that as in a Walsh scene in a prison jute mill, a sweat shop place which would madden an Upton Sinclair: the frenetic, boxed-in crisscrossing of paths and the corrupt clamour, hellish Hale of prole types.

Victor McLaglen, Edmund Lowe in 'Under Pressure' (1935): '... the great traffic cop of movies. ...'





Cagney in 'White Heat' (1949): '... the sense of a busy day at the factory'

Safe, trend-conscious producers (Hal Wallis, Robert Buchner) wouldn't dream of hiring Walsh to handle their prized Oscar-race entries, metaphysical bog-rap (The *Story of Louis Pasteurized, Juarez*) starring Paul Money. Walsh, a Peter Pan perpetual boy scout, did unsophisticated, boyish, swaggering movies for six decades. Well within Walsh's sweet-natured, high schoolish value system are the poignant, just buddies, untactile relationships (co-workers, the *Strawberry Blonde* dentist and his father), enduring love for a wholesome icon family, the neighbourhood conceived as a family unit, lead characters played as Dandies (the *Strawberry Blonde* dentist loves the town beauty for her style; Gentleman Jim Corbett has a lustful admiration for the upper class elegance and style of the Olympic Club and its members; Danny Dolan has an aspiration for stylish garments, the right hats). A possible Museum of Modern Art retrospective of boyish Hog Walsh: Cagney, strangely soothed and thoughtful as though he's just read James Joyce for the first time, returning from the dark woods where he's been quietly communing with his deceased mother: 'I liked it out there. M-m (savouring the memory of it). Nice feeling out there talking to Ma.' A mad-dog killer returning to his mountain hideaway to find his two punkish assistants have had a silly spat; one is hiding sheepishly in the woods, the other is barricaded inside a cabin. Edward G. Robinson performing an aerial act amidst live electric wires, plummeting 30 feet to the ground through sparkling electrical jolts, dying in his buddy's arms with the final comment, 'I was out of line, way out of line.'

A miniaturised, shrunken version of Walsh's 'little big shot' position in the studio caste system might be any of the following handymen: Earl Morrall, Don Knotts, Howard Cosell, Hubert Humphrey. Like the dancing, caroming scappers who populate his movies, Walsh moved around a lot, spiking any sick-slow scene the studio had, while turning out a preposterously prolific number of his own films per year. The *Roaring Twenties*—a young man who distinguishes himself in war trenches comes home to unemployment and a bootlegging career—follows predictable plot patterns but is acted-directed in such a feisty, snub-nosed, tight-britches fashion that it occasionally soars. *High Sierra*, a half-likeable struggle between the dated, moralistic Burnett-Huston script and Walsh's dry burning touch with Lupino, a cunningly aged, tired Bogart and a squashed, bedridden Donald McBride who springs Bogart from the pen for one last caper, annoyingly

jumps back and forth between the gangster's loathsome partners in crime and a white picket fence area inhabited by mawkishly played Steinbeckian Oakies. It's somewhat like a Breughel (the overpopulated scene has some deadly stereotypes including a jinx mechanical Hugh Herbertish pooch, environmental sweep, and a slow, non-shortcut type of detailing), but Walsh's environmental imagination is countered by the heavy moves that the script makes. *White Heat* is an alternation of one spectacular Cagney scene for every dud involving Ed O'Brien's sloppy telegraphed reactions, especially for a gang infiltrator whose speciality is nerveless conning. Walsh goes to sleep when he handles Decency, the wooden lawyer who works for the DA's office in *Roaring Twenties*, the four bland T-men tendrils in *White Heat* who possess one remarkable idiosyncrasy, a baton-like cigarette holder, the banker stiffs in *Gentleman Jim*, the colourless insipid blonde who jilts Cagney in *Roaring Twenties*, Ward Bond's inflated chest and moustache chewing as John L. Sullivan ('I can lick any man in the world'). *Gentleman Jim*, a distinguished singularity in movies, is a non-pious-pedantic biography in which Errol Flynn's mocking over-confidence is cleverly employed in the role of a shameless social climber who maddeningly maintains poise and balance through endless rowdy Irish family bashes and heavyweight bouts.

Why dig up this 'great action director' whose enormous progeny includes such clunkers as *Saskatchewan*, *Distant Trumpet*, whole scenes devoted to the art of spitting and to an obscenely acted, scene-hogging drunk, whole films carbonated with ironic bawdy jokers or miserably maudlin weepers? It's a rank understatement to say that Walsh's personality has never been properly identified. Either he is lauded as a pure, uninhibited pagan who found formula action stories to be an ideal, uncompromising framework in which to celebrate the spirit of adventure, or else he is rudely put down as an unworthy, featureless assemblyman of invariable Warners' pulp. Actually Walsh is at his most stale stereotyped when he handles compulsory action-adventure situations, whereas his position deep within the studio served to inspire his treatment of earthy, bread-and-butter human conditions, where the spirit as well as the body is yoked, burdened, slack, unassertive.

Walsh deserves to be reseen through a modern looking glass, but to dissolve the studio influence from any discussion of his films leaves him a fantasy figure of this or that rating system, dated, easily read. It's easy today to rate Sturges as a stinging satirist of American myths by ignoring the image's desperate pushing and shoving and constrictedness. Hawks' films can be read as moral tales of danger-defying professionals only by deleting the studio conditions which appear visually as cliquish characters enjoying a pampered security and insulation. Walsh's stagnant, no-promotions role as a Warner's factory hand led him inevitably to undercut purportedly Good Thoughts (pro-family, pro-working crew, pro-fidelity and trust) with homely congestion and bitter dailiness. He insists on keeping people away from the centre of the event, using endless plays for separating two pals or a



'Manpower' (1941): 'the ex-girl-con (Dietrich) defiantly paints away while Raft glowers...'

married couple, increasing loneliness, the feeling of doom, so that hope is sucked out of the character. Walsh's inclusion of scenes of daily human pathétique should separate him immediately from American mooring, and especially from the action specialists, Hawks, Farrow, Curtiz, with whom he's usually classed. A good director of homeliness, innocence, vulnerability, Walsh can be amazingly direct, forthright, clear, rhythmic, a dedicated-to-folk cousin of Renoir's *Toni*, Vigo's *L'Atalante*, Brassai's street life photographs, with more brisk jocularity than his French counterparts.

Manpower, about emergency repairmen who work on high voltage power lines in ferocious pseudo storms, is a very strange sombre movie. The sadness of its triangle lovers, scenes of the most homely daily order, the amount of material on sexual ignorance, impotence, and hysteria make this a primitive movie with subtle directing. A convict's first day out of prison is usually a number one stumble in movies (e.g., the *High Sierra* opening with the prissy editorialising in Huston's script: one contrived, structured, informative fact after another about the rediscovered wonders of fresh air, sunlight, park foliage, plus a stray newspaper with the convict's public enemy face punctured in the left nostril by a trash collector's pedantic paper-sticker). In the feverish *Manpower*, the First Moment Out, acted awesomely straight by the least statuesque Marlene Dietrich, takes a surprising, abrupt right-angle turn to a little local drugstore, very quiet and sidestreet drab; the ex-girl-con says 'Stop here' and she heads with a fierce resolve to the cosmetic counter, where she buys cream-lipstick mascara and defiantly paints away while Raft glowers his once-a-tramp-always-a-tramp philosophy.

Both this scene and one in *Honeymoon* kitchen are photographed-acted with a great chasm of tension between a man and woman. Walsh is always angling out of a familiar movie situation by doubling and tripling the environments and splitting the people apart with terrifying, unmodified pathos. Robinson, drunk and passed out on his wedding night, wakes up and panics when his wife's not in bed the next morning. This is a cliché image, but Walsh then travels into the hopeless disparity of man and wife. He layers misery—the deepest naïve optimism of a husband, a wife's despairing realisation of not hitting the Marital Jackpot in any sense—into unglamorised scenery. Robinson's beer joint hostess wife is in the kitchen whipping biscuits from scratch. Robinson's ecstasy is funny—pathetic: 'Did you make these?'

then rushing off to show his crew the biscuits, the proof of his wife's true-bluness. ('Fay, my wife, made these, the best biscuits you'll ever eat.') In *Roaring Twenties*, Cagney takes a show biz beginner home on the last train to New Rochelle. It's probably one of the best familiarising locale scenes; it is so strict, clean, shrewd about positioning people and camera. The cunning—a quiet intimate first date zeroed in from the end of a train car over the head of a passed-out drunk—is in doubling the pathos and humour of a scene that is instantly stationary and enclosed.

Walsh seems inspired primarily when poetising a glum, unsunny, lower middle class milieu that's miles from the graceful, dauntless life-styles pictured in expensive, expansive, dream-factory fabrications by Cukor, Wyler or Hitchcock. Pinball machines and cigarette smog provide essential atmospheric details for an unbuttoned society with no prohibitive admission requirements—grace, wit, or effervescence—where the typical man's outfit includes a tight-fitting hat with a narrow turned up brim and a zip-up waist-length jacket that makes the wearer look chubby or puffed. A director whose feel for small-time, scrappy wage earners possibly came from his own cooperative, energetic function in the movie industry, Walsh made a mistake when he misread his own strengths (he was insistently touted as a flexible master of swift-moving adventure epics) and abandoned stagnant, suspended scenes of truckers resting up at an all-night roadside café before tackling the next leg of the truck route, of a bedraggled dame (Gladys George) consoling a deposed rackets chief mourning his lowered status over beer after beer, of the petty, racy banter passed around with waitresses, chorus girls and hat-checkers. His later movies tend to look like *Captain Horatio Hornblower*: stiff swashbuckler costumes pushing a sweeping, episodic narrative, glued together with look-alike shots of handsome vessels ploughing like logs through the water.

The great traffic cop of movies, keeping things moving, hustling actors around an intersection-like screen that's generally empty in the centre, Walsh's style is based on travelling over routes which are sometimes accomplished by bodily movement, the passage that a gaze takes, suggested or actually shown, and the movement of a line of dialogue, the route indicated by a gesture. The fact that spitting is often used in very early Walsh suggests how importantly Paths figure in his syntax. Birthed in films as a Griffith actor and the director of Fairbanks' films, his no-shortcut style is steeped in the silent film necessity for excessive, frantic visual explication, taking nothing for granted.

The usual route for Walsh is to slow the development by increasing specificity. It is very cunning: by the time his gangster comes apart, is shot down, or shoots his way through an ambush, Walsh has slyly doubled and tripled every move that the gangster makes in terms of height, texture, path, angle and sound. Cagney's psychotic break in the penitentiary dining hall involves a messy, noisy tantrum after he hears his beloved Ma has been gunned down. Every move Cagney makes has been



'High Sierra' (1941): 'Walsh's dry burning touch with Lupino, a cunningly aged, tired Bogart...'



'Me and My Gal' (1931): 'a bank heist that starts from an over-the-bank living room'

counterpointed and varied. His incredible frenzy literally swimming through cutlery and china down the length of a table has twice been anticipated with a slow camera dolly down the table and back, picking out each diner who gets splashed and shocked by Cagney's tantrum crawl across the table. Cagney's running battle through a half-dozen guards spaced at crucial spots around the hall has been anticipated by a quiet over-the-hall long shot as the prisoners file in and angle off into the various aisles. The battle itself is frenzy improvised with perfect Cagney instincts: characteristically it is a mesh of variations on pace and height, ending with Cagney being carried by the guards down the aisles and out the hall, above their heads like a frantically struggling fish on a tray.

The melancholic fact about this natural, unsophisticated humanist is that he is often alone in playing straight rather than cynical (Hawks), surrealistic (Farrow), or patronising (Huston) with genre material. Walsh, who wrote some scripts as bald copies of hit films he directed, and probably entered each new project with 'Christ, it's not bad. It reminds me of my last movie,' never fights his material, playing directly into the staleness. He is like his volatile, instinctive, not-too-smart characters, who, when they are at their most genuine, are unreclaimable, terrifying loners, perhaps past their peak and going nowhere.

In 1931 he directed his best film, *Me and My Gal*, an unpredictable jauntiness built around a dubious theme: 'Life is sunny, if you don't stir it up.' A suspended moment of grace for Walsh and Tracy, when newness and budding maturity were clicking for them, Tracy banters back and forth over a beanery cash register with a Harlow-ish sass machine (Joan Bennett): 'Haven't I seen you someplace?' Packing flaunty and insolent earthiness into a challenging act, Miss Bennett's waitress answers: 'Maybe, I've been someplace.' This did-I-hear-right crack, early vaudeville style, is fleshed out

with typical Walsh-engineered acting: mock documentary—full bodies in full space—that sifts into material that is innocent, anachronistic, quietly amoral. Despite the inevitable expectoration, truculent drunk, talentless slapstick, this primitive oh-you-kid effervescence is inspiring for its balmy innocent actors: J. Farrel McDonald, as an Irish father whose leering-winking face, in screen-filling close-ups, comes off as blunt Godard put-on commenting; Bennett, the least lockjawed and haughty version, as a slinky, don't push me around toughie, chewing gum ('You're a pretty tough Beezock; why don't you park that gum?'); the youngest, most buoyant Tracy usually free-loading off someone's table, combining outrageous swagger with a self-mocking he enjoys to the hilt. His favourite move: he pushes out his cheek with his tongue, does a pleasantly sociable leer, mouths an automatic sarcasm, 'Let me see if you have a hat fit for a detective,' that hardly parts his lips.

It is only fleetingly a gangster film, not quite outrightly comic: it is really a portrait of a neighbourhood, the feeling of human bonds in a guileless community, a lyrical approximation of Lower East Side and its uneducated, spirited stevedore-clerk-shop-keeper cast. There is psychological rightness in the scale relationships of actors to locale, and this, coupled with liberated acting, make an exhilarating poetry about a brash-cocky-exuberant provincial. Walsh, in this lunatically original, festive dance, is nothing less than a poet of the American immigrant. Certain scenes—the hoods trying to trick a passionate vulnerable sister into intoxication and collusion on a bank job; a clandestine embrace in a drab narrow hallway; a fabulously arrogant bank heist that starts from an over-the-bank living room; a joyfully fresh prelim to courtship on a parlour sofa that includes Bennett's provocative swaggering dance from sofa to victrola—are terrifying exposures for the actors. Bennett's provocative room-crossing is that of a snake, half-falling apart, trying to amble a room vertically and non-chalantly.

The movie has a double nature, looking exactly like 1931 just after the invention of sound, and one that has queer passages that pop out of the story line, foreshadowing the technical effects of '60s films. These quirky inclusions, the unconscious oddities of a director with an unquestioning belief in genre who keeps breaking out of its boundaries, seem timeless and suggest a five-cent movie with mysterious depth. A crowd of neighbours swilling unbelievable amounts of food, a big sea captain, rhino face and figure, eating whole herrings in one gulp, are less contrived versions of the expressionism in *Leo the Last*, *The Servant*, *Goodbye Columbus*. 'That's my son-in-law Eddy; he's a nice lad even though he does look like a runaway horse.' This dark comedy scoff is backed up with shots of a shockingly homely, foolishly grinning simpleton, a total butt of the family's jokes.

If hardwares sold a house paint called Gusto, the number one customer would be Walsh: six decades in film using a jabbing, forthright crispness to occasionally vitalise the crudest hack fiction. ■

'If 20,000 hippies from all over the world had gathered for a drug and sex orgy, the TV news cameras would have been there like a shot.

'Why, then, no pictures of the 20,000 Scouts at the World Jamboree in Japan—500 of them from Britain? The vast majority of youngsters are still a credit to this country and their activities for the good of mankind should be given the publicity they deserve.'

—Letter in *TV Times*

David Wilson

News from Nowhere News from Nowhere News from Nowhere News



Personality and display: the BBC's main evening news

The dust of Britain's second 1974 general election campaign had hardly settled when BBC television was attacked by the leaders of the Labour Party on the grounds that its presentation of the campaign had been distorted. The press, lords of their own manors, put this down to the Left's 'traditional' persecution complex ('... persecution mania is still the approved mental condition of British socialism,' said *The Sunday Times*). The BBC, treading a wary line between their own mounting pressure for an increase in the television licence fee and an uncomfortable awareness of a Labour Party committee's recommendation that the Corporation should lose its independence, did gentle obeisance at the shrine of 'balance'. Political commentators of all shades and opinions insisted that since all parties at one time or another discover bias in television reporting of politics, there cannot in fact be any bias—a conclusion whose complacency is matched only by its illogicality.

It would not of course be difficult to assemble evidence of a consistent right (or left or centrist) bias in television coverage of either of 1974's election campaigns. An American study of television reporting of the 1968 Presidential campaign detected a network anti-Nixon bias, on the basis of a statistical analysis of 323,100 words used in network newscasts during the campaign.* In Britain, where the constraints on broadcasting's political reporting are much more rigorous, even so unscientific an analysis as a word count would be considerably less likely to produce evidence for a persistent political bias. There are many reasons for this, but the most important of them

derives from the very nature of British television journalism.

Television journalism means more than television news. Like the press, television did not take long to discover that straightforward news bulletins, read into camera by a single presenter under orders to suppress his personality, did not reflect to their best advantage the technological and manpower resources of the medium. Not more than twenty years ago television news was still being read over a still photograph of Big Ben. Then in the 1950s, thanks to the efforts

*Edith Efron, *The News Twisters*, 1971.

of a group of iconoclasts (who were ironically not themselves part of the traditionally conservative news department), television news in Britain was transformed—at about the same time that television itself was becoming a genuinely mass medium. What happened, to cut a long story short, was that in news-gathering techniques and in presentation television news began increasingly to imitate the successful news magazine programmes like *Tonight*, some of whose own reporters had previously worked for the highly successful news feature magazine *Picture Post*.

A predictable though by no means inevitable consequence has been that as the news itself has moved closer to the magazine format the magazine programmes have fallen away, both in frequency and seriousness of content. *Tonight* was often, even self-consciously, whimsical; *Nationwide*, which is transmitted at about the same time in the early evening, is often simply frivolous. The move away from information and towards entertainment was officially sanctioned when a ratings-conscious BBC, worried by the competition of ITN's livelier *News at Ten*, decided to extend its main evening news so that it would qualify for a place in the ratings. With the longer news came a BBC version of ITN's format: headlines, a signature tune, and a pair of newscasters yoyoing between items against a background of a newsroom with all the exciting paraphernalia of typewriters and telephones, secretaries and sub-editors. (This curious obsession with the technology of news reporting reached its apotheosis in the BBC's election night programme, when it often seemed that the actual election results were secondary to the sophisticated gadgetry wheeled on to collect and interpret them.)

Two further developments illustrate the increasing importance assigned to the presentation of news programmes in the minds of the television organisations. The BBC's current affairs programme *Panorama*, which recently celebrated its twenty-first year on the air, now almost invariably prefers a single issue to the magazine format (a change again partly dictated by the success of a rival programme, Granada's *World in Action*). And the main evening news on the minority channel, BBC-2, significantly titled *News Extra*, has taken on some of the aspects of the old news magazine programmes, with relatively lengthy background reports on subjects which in the strict sense are not news at all. At the same time the early evening news on BBC-2 has been replaced by a fifteen-minute programme in which Robin Day, high priest of television interviewers (and himself concerned about the present direction of television journalism: see his article in *Encounter*, May 1970), interviews a personality in the news; the programme's title, *Newsday*, representing the final conjunction of news and television personality. Taken together, these programmes would add up to what the BBC would call balanced programming; except that the balance is now heavily tipped in favour of the news programme.

Television news, in other words, has developed an identifiable and self-conscious personality, fashioned out of a technological and organisational revolution which coincided with the realisation that the public

were increasingly relying on television as their main source of news. Anthony Smith, in his book *The Shadow in the Cave*, makes 1968 the watershed year for television news, the year when Russian tanks in Prague, the May events in Paris and the riots at the Democratic convention in Chicago were beamed into the world's living rooms almost as they happened. There is considerable argument about whether this relatively recent predominance of television over other communications media is the cause or the effect of changing attitudes in the viewing audience. Does television inherently generate news, as some anxious critics have argued? Or does television, in this case television news, merely reflect a process of which it is itself a part? The probable answer is that there is truth on both sides of this argument, and the real truth lies somewhere in between. One common factor, at least in a democratic society, is the recognition by those who

shockwaves which went through American broadcasting in the wake of former Vice-President Spiro Agnew's onslaught against what he called the 'tiny, enclosed fraternity of privileged men' who control American television news. Agnew's notorious speech was made in Des Moines. The irony was not lost on the American networks. Here, in the journalistic paradigm of Middle America, a Vice-President had attacked television for distorting the news. Did he not know, the networks could justifiably have replied, that television instinctively seeks the middle ground? This is equally true of British television news. By and large news programmes are instinctively, if only implicitly, hostile to political views which are more than a little left or right of centre—which explains why most politicians mistrust television (while making more and more use of it).

A recent example of this tendency in Britain was television's treatment of Sir

Associated with this attraction for the centre ground is television's innate (and increasing) concern for its own institutional independence. In a very real sense the survival of television's present institutional structures depends on television itself being one step ahead of what is generally understood to be the political drift at any one moment. This, along with television's need to maintain its curious relationship with government, partly explains why television news in Britain appeared to drift slightly to the left in the early 1960s, moved right again towards the end of the decade, and shifted away from the right during last winter's discontent. This movement implies no conscious decision on the part of television newsmen; nor does it necessarily reflect a change of personnel. Television, as always, was merely anticipating the tide. News, and the news 'values' which underlie it, cannot exist in a political vacuum.

Spiro Agnew's anti-television speech was carefully calculated to appeal to the widespread scepticism about television news in America. No British politician would make such a ploy, since in general the British public appears to believe what it sees on television news.* The traditional scepticism towards newspaper 'facts', which has increased as newspapers have lost ground to TV as the main source of news, has not yet extended to television news. There are a few signs, notably the increasing willingness of the television audience to select their programme diet (by switching over or off), that this may be about to happen, as part of a general disaffection with television: a tendency which may not be unconnected with the recent upswing in cinema attendances, after years of steady decline. It will be a long time, on present evidence, before the television audience does stop believing in the television news. But I would suggest that the process may well be accelerated by the progressive drift in television news away from information and towards spectacle. The medium, in fact, is becoming the message.

How this is happening can perhaps best be illustrated empirically, if only because it is deceptively easy (and deceptive) to demonstrate the point in the vacuum of McLuhanism. A television news monitoring exercise conducted in 1971 by ACTT, the film and television technicians' union, showed fairly conclusively that television news reporting of trade union affairs during the week of the exercise was implicitly antipathetic to the unions. (Significantly, the week was the one in which the then Conservative government introduced its Industrial Relations Act; again, television was confirming the status quo, despite the widespread opposition to the Act.) In general, this exercise recorded television's natural tendency to associate political attitudes with political actions (if it moves, film it—particularly if it moves against the status quo). But the problem with single issue monitoring exercises is not only that they generally prove what they set out to prove, but that they do not relate the



Behind the scenes of the old one-man Nine O'Clock News

control the medium of changing attitudes in those (including themselves) who make use of it. Anthony Smith puts it this way:

'In an apparatus of mass communication, the human, mechanical and institutional retooling necessary to create a new genre is so expensive to bring about that it can only occur when a new definition of the receiving audience is itself ready in the minds of the communicators. In other words, a new sense of society always precedes a major step forward in broadcasting, and that change involves a change in the mechanics of the medium itself.'

Television news is now itself news. But while there is some evidence that television news practitioners are alarmed by the power of the communications machine they have created, there are few if any signs that the television organisations are willing to be challenged about the way they exercise that power.

In fact, television newsmen are extraordinarily sensitive to criticism, as witness the

Keith Joseph's speech about the moral state of the nation. Television, like the press only more so, jumped on the more controversial sections of the speech; and though there was no explicit hostility in the news itself, Sir Keith can have been left in no doubt that he had offended against the liberal consensus enshrined in the process by which television selects and presents the news. Anthony Wedgwood Benn, occupying about the same position on the left as Sir Keith Joseph does on the right, gets approximately the same treatment. It is not that television newsmen are all politically middle-of-the-road. What happens is that television news, with its tradition of neutrality (partly inherited from newspaper journalism but mostly imposed by the nature of the relationship between broadcasting and the state), naturally gravitates towards the centre, the supposedly neutral territory where issues can be resolved by reasoned argument. Ideology is taboo, if it challenges television's own ideology.

*Except in Ulster, where political/religious antagonisms consistently determine attitudes to most things, including television's studiously 'neutral' reporting of events there.

particular issue to the context of the whole of television news reporting. With this problem in mind, I decided to monitor the total television coverage of news on one particular day.

The day was Monday, October 28. It was chosen not quite at random since it was a day when—as far as these things can be predicted—no particular item was likely to dominate the news, as the election had a few weeks earlier, and as Nixon's resignation or the Cyprus war had before that. The main television news events of the day were as follows, listed in the order in which they appeared on all three channels (though of course there were variations throughout the day as fresh stories broke): 1) a car bomb in an army camp in Ulster; 2) strikes in Scotland; 3) a police siege of a Dutch prison in which prisoners were holding hostages; 4) a bomb under the Minister of Sport's car; 5) a Bordeaux wine scandal trial; 6) a protest about a projected rates increase; 7) an Arab summit meeting in Rabat; 8) a record-breaking greyhound.

In accordance with standard news-gathering and editorial principles, these items were shuffled and supplemented as the day wore on: in the evening, for instance, the Arab summit gradually lost out to the greyhound. ITN led on the Ulster bomb in each of its three news programmes: the lunchtime *First Report* (20 minutes), the early evening news (10 minutes) and the main evening news (30 minutes, including a commercial break). The BBC was less decisive, leading on the Ulster bomb in its lunchtime (5 minutes) and early evening news (15 minutes), but switching to the Scottish strikes to start its main evening news (25 minutes). By the late evening news on BBC-1 (8 minutes) the lead item was the bomb under the Minister of Sport's car. This story had broken during the main evening news, where it was accorded television's equivalent of a news agency 'flash'.

The selection, presentation and treatment of these stories provides some information about the general principles underlying television news. But first, for comparison, it is worth recording how the press dealt with the same day's news. The final editions of the two London evening papers both led with the Ulster car bomb story. Next morning the main story headlines read:

TIMES: Minister's wife and son escape in blast

GUARDIAN: Minister's wife and child in car explosion

DAILY TELEGRAPH: Minister's car booby trapped

DAILY MAIL: Minister's wife bombed

SUN: Bomb blasts Minister's car

DAILY MIRROR: Minister's family in bomb blast

MORNING STAR: Pickets' defence was 'badgered'—QC

FINANCIAL TIMES: Scottish drivers' pay deal could lift charges 25%

With the exception of the *Financial Times* and the *Morning Star*, both rather special cases, every paper led on the Minister of Sport car bomb story. This choice (like the inaccuracy of some of the headlines) is partly explained by timing: the bomb was discovered at about 9 p.m., in time for the final editions to have their

front pages re-arranged. But what is interesting in this comparative exercise is that in several papers some of the stories selected by the television news programmes (including the Scottish strikes, the Dutch jail siege and the Bordeaux wine trial) did not even make the front page. In some cases there were practical reasons for this: tabloid papers don't have the front page room for more than one big splash. But the difference between press and television coverage cannot wholly be explained by different journalistic practice. The difference is also a significant pointer to what might be called the first principle of television news: news is important in direct ratio to its impact as television.

The only regular exception to this principle is the event which so overshadows the day's news that it demands priority treatment regardless of its potential for visual illustration. But in general television news will *always* give prominence to events

sense of drama was almost entirely spurious, because nothing was happening, was irrelevant in TV news terms. The information contained in a three-minute film report could have been contained in three sentences read over a still photograph. But that would not have been good television. The spectacle was more important than the event; in this case *was* the event.

Television news editors apply many of the same criteria which inform newspaper editorial decisions: 'human interest' stories, a preference for national over local news but national over international news, and so on. But television, by its nature, tends to exaggerate the relative importance of some of these criteria. The Dutch prison siege was given extensive coverage on both channels because of the journalistic practice of continuity, the running story convention. The newspapers also carried reports of the story; but not on the front page because there was not much new to report that day.



ITN's News at Ten. Photograph by John Winters, Kodak News

which can be illustrated by film. The technology of television (lightweight cameras, the use of satellites, and so on) has advanced television news well beyond the days when VIPs were faithfully filmed at airports even when they had nothing to say—though this still happens. But the (quite natural) bias towards the visual in the editorial sifting process increasingly determines not only what news events are to be included, but also what relative priority they have in a particular programme. Hence the prominence of the Dutch prison siege story in each of that day's news programmes. This was a running story, and there were no significant developments on that day. But the cameras were there (which costs money), and the combination of lights and waiting police and a general air of expectancy gave the pictures a sense of drama (played up by the voice-over commentary of the on the spot reporter) such as no newspaper photograph of this non-event could have expressed. The fact that this

Television news, on the other hand, having no inside pages, is forced by its own judgment of what news should be to keep everything up front, at the expense of an order of priority decided by any objective standards.

Hence the extensive coverage on all channels of the Bordeaux wine trade scandal, which provided some picturesque visual stuffing; and of the record-breaking greyhound story, which had human interest and visual potential but which was otherwise, on a news programme, hardly worth the time on a day when there were several significant hard news stories. In this context it is noticeable that the BBC tends to relegate the inside page story to its late night minority channel programme *News Extra*, whose tone and approach assume a special relationship with what is taken to be a more sophisticated audience. A late news programme, less concerned with the competitive element which dominates the peak time programmes, can afford to be more relaxed. Though this can work both ways: *News*

Extra on this particular night had a lengthy film report on the background to the World Heavyweight title fight in Zaire, and gave even longer coverage than the main evening news to the ubiquitous greyhound.

Selection overlaps with presentation. On October 28, *News at Ten* had fifteen items in less than thirty minutes, including a special film report from Rhodesia by star reporter Michael Nicholson which would more appropriately have belonged in a documentary or current affairs programme, since it had no immediate news context. The BBC's *Nine O'Clock News* had even more items (seventeen) in less time. Like the alternating newscasters, this plethora of items is a symptom of the entertainment emphasis in the presentation of news. The effect of so much news would be overwhelming if the stories were not carefully orchestrated to keep viewer attention reasonably focused. Both channels, for instance, will often end the news with a lightweight, sometimes whimsical story; except when the main news has been so gloomy that a humorous tailpiece would be felt inappropriate. Another feature of this urge towards snappy presentation is the increasing use of technical paraphernalia. A news editor needs only the slightest pretext for a map or a chart, preferably animated. And identification is now obligatory: ITN reporters invariably sign off; BBC men are identified by captions or photographs of themselves in a box at the edge of the screen. Again, television puts a disproportionate emphasis on a standard journalistic practice.

This obsession with presentation is symptomatic of two impulses which are often in conflict. The news must appear exciting or urgent (anything to avoid 'There's nothing on the news tonight'); film, even when it is visual wallpaper or simply irrelevant, is therefore to be preferred to a talking head. On the other hand a news programme does not happen in a vacuum, being like any other programme part of what Raymond Williams has called 'the central television experience: the fact of flow.' Television fills a vacuum of boredom. It requires conscious effort to pick up and read a newspaper, but television news is just a unit in an evening's viewing, overlapping with whatever happens to precede and follow it (unlike BBC radio news, which still keeps a distance between itself and the surrounding programmes). The experience is difficult to define, but its effect can be seen in the way television news is orchestrated. Headlines are now standard; *News at Ten* invariably precedes its commercial break with a summary of what one can expect after the ads, as well as an exhortation to 'stay with us'.

There are of course different kinds of response to different programmes. But the nearer news gets to spectacle, the less chance it has of eliciting its own distinctive response. Television newsmen are naturally aware of this. Hence the arrangement of news programmes not to the best advantage of the news itself but in the way most likely to keep the viewer watching. On October 29, the BBC's main evening news was extended: not for more detailed coverage of the new Labour government's programme as outlined that day in the Queen's Speech, but for an interview—in Australia—with Prince Charles.

News on television is thus not news in the usually accepted sense, but a carefully sifted, selected and programmed response to what in television terms are regarded as the newsworthy events of the day. Here again television applies in its own distinctive way a standard popular press convention. But whereas a newspaper can go out on a limb and give its own particular slant to a news story, even (like the *Guardian*) encouraging its reporters to interpret as well as report, television has a built-in tendency to iron out the news. The broadcasting organisation has become accustomed to seeing itself as presenting a balanced, reasonable view of the world which by and large reflects the dominant beliefs of the society which makes its audience. This is an inherent feature of a broadcasting organisation in a democratic society, particularly when, like the BBC, the organisation itself is regarded and regards itself as a public service. The effect on television news is a continuous sifting process, at all levels, to ensure that the news reflects television's view both of itself and of what it detects as the current consensus. In consequence, television news neuter the news.

This phenomenon affects every item of news on television, but one example will suffice. The news programmes on October 28 all reported a number of strikes in Scotland, with the emphasis on public service stoppages (sewage workers and city dustmen in Glasgow). The consensus view of strikes is that they are essentially disruptive. As indeed they are, but that is only part of the picture. Not, though, of television's pictures. The Scottish public service strikes were reported in graphic detail: piles of rotting garbage and the Clyde clogged with untreated sewage. Television cannot be blamed for isolating powerful images of the effects of a strike; but it can be blamed for failing to balance those images (even if that were possible) by explaining them with a few facts about the background to the strikes.

A week later the BBC's news had some dramatic film of fires in Montreal during a firemen's strike. The pictures were irresistible; what the news did resist was any detail about why the firemen were on strike. And the film was included in a series of short news reports of strikes in Britain. There was no connection between these events other than the word 'strike' with all its emotive connotations. In Anthony Smith's phrase, the television camera 'forces light out and heat in, whenever argument occurs.' A confusion of cause and effect is endemic in television news. This accounts for the way in which pressure groups deliberately create news for television, just as fringe political groups use elections less for votes than for publicity. Forty years on, television has still to learn the lesson of *Triumph of the Will*.

A study of news broadcasting in Finland concluded that 'the main thing retained from the news is that nothing special has happened.' British television news would quite probably produce a similar response. As long as television news is presented as a package, its content determined by a supposed consumer response but with little or no feedback from the actual consumer, it runs a real danger of a credibility crisis. When that happens, as the American experience indicates, the political pressures begin. It may be happening now. ■

APPROXIMATELY THEMSELVES?

**Philip Purser
writes on 'The Family'**

Even those who couldn't abide *The Family* will have welcomed Colin Young's encyclopaedic assessment of the BBC Television programme and the responses it drew. Television criticism of such thoroughness has been lacking since *Contrast* disappeared. But the Director of the National Film School's natural interest in, and understanding of, the procedural problems in shooting this kind of film seems to have left him a little unconcerned about the real antipathy many of us felt at the receiving end of the show, which I believe to be a symptom of a profound distrust of the whole convention.

A lesser point is that, with the exception of Roger Graef's *The Space Between Words*, all the references to comparable experiments were inevitably (since Young spent so long over there) taken from the American scene. Of course he could hardly have omitted *The Family*'s immediate inspiration, *An American Family*, and I wouldn't raise the matter were it not that one previous native venture is curiously relevant as a distant early warning both of the inconsistencies of domestic real-life documentary (or whatever you call it) and the misgivings it arouses. This was John Boorman's *The Newcomers*, made in 1964. Boorman had previously worked on a series of action profiles called *Citizen '63*. Here he concentrated on a young couple, Anthony and Alison Smith, living in the mildly Bohemian, BBC-ish quarter of Bristol. Tom Stoppard, then working for the local newspaper, made guest appearances as A Friend.

Colin Young reminds us that the producer of *The Family*, Paul Watson, originally planned to feed outside events into proceedings so that the three-day week, the February election and so on could be discussed from the Wilkins' point of view. This didn't happen because the Wilkins were much too wrapped up in their own

affairs. It is possible that Boorman had the same idea. Certainly the opening episode of *The Newcomers* was overshadowed by what must have been the last execution of a condemned man in the local prison. Then here, too, the idea was abandoned in favour of the Smiths' private preoccupations, notably the impending birth of their first baby. A rather more ominous parallel was set up when in a cricket match sequence Boorman jettisoned all pretence to an impassive observer stance and dressed up Anthony Smith's progress to the wicket in terms of Alan Ladd going into battle in *Shane*. Ten years later Paul Watson was to overlay Tom Bernes' wedding day with the *High Noon* theme music.

'Meanwhile the heavily pregnant Alison Smith stayed at home soulfully reciting Louis MacNeice's poem of the unborn child. I was about to say that I find her one of the most irritatingly smug heroines I've encountered, but how do you say this about someone who is being approximately her real self?' I wrote that in the *Sunday Telegraph* at the time, and while I wouldn't want it for the collected aphorisms I think it identifies part of the embarrassment which still lies at the heart of what Colin Young concedes is a 'genuine cultural argument.'

In flesh and blood circumstances we are constantly forming and expressing opinions about people we encounter, but are normally answerable for them. If I make a snide remark about the mote in my neighbour's eye he may well indicate the beam in mine. When we are made privy to someone else's affairs while remaining invisible and uninvolved we are instinctively unhappy with the one-sided relationship. Viewers found Terry Wilkins supine, Gary and Karen apparently unwilling to lift a finger on their own behalf, Marian foul-mouthed and her suitor Tom Bernes unspeakable, and in a strange way they resented the inability to say so even behind the Wilkins' backs! Margaret, of course, was the most trying of them all, bossy, sententious, invincibly sure of herself and all too familiar.

It still doesn't altogether explain the vehemence of the antipathy towards *The Family* which is evident in some of the comments reproduced alongside Colin Young's article. I suggest that people may have been reacting to what they instinctively felt to be a series of false claims—not the giant red herring of the *Radio Times* description of the Wilkins as a typical family, which Young disposes of, but claims or presumptions inherent in the fabrication of the show.

A basic one was that even if the Wilkins were not to be regarded as representative, the programme would represent their ordinary routine. In the event the ordinary routine was mostly edited out and only the more dramatic peaks retained: the key quarrels, the crises, the Majorcan holiday (a product of the television arrangement) and the wedding (precipitated by it). It is true that in the pioneering days of *cinéma vérité* Drew and Leacock chose to make films about individuals during periods of heightened preoccupation—the racing driver Eddie Sachs on the eve of Indianapolis, Jane Fonda opening (disastrously as things turned out) on Broadway. The

thinking was that being preoccupied they would be less aware of the camera. But this particularity was self-evident, part of the premise of the film.

Then there was the claim, laboured in the opening episode, that the Wilkins had entered voluntarily, indeed unhesitatingly, into the exposure of their private lives on television; the adults, maybe, but the boy Christopher? Really understanding what it implied? What is the age of consent in such matters? The scene in which he was reduced to tears over his school report achieved deserved notoriety. Colin Young attributes its failure to the omission, whether accidental or deliberate, of the actual exchange which made Christopher start to cry. I should have thought the whole incident was deeply offensive and also deeply suspect. Terry and Margaret, as Young puts it, 'are giving him [Christopher] the usual middle class aspirant line.' I thought they were supposed to be a working class family. What they seemed to me to be doing was to don a nagging attitude which they felt behoved them as public parents, and which might never have occurred to them without the presence of the camera.

This role-playing is a crucial factor, and one which Colin Young flirts with maddeningly. He is astute about Margaret Wilkins's dual function as Mother Courage heroine and mistress of ceremonies, casting herself—'interposing' would be more accurate—as a built-in interviewer. He is authoritative on the different degrees of participation available to the film-maker. But he seems untroubled (except as regards that *High Noon* conceit) by Paul Watson's lurching from convention to convention within a single episode. Terry, say, is chatting to his mates at the bus depot, or Christopher in class at school; everyone stonily pretends the cameraman and sound recordist and director aren't there; the viewer is to be the well-known fly on the wall. In the next scene Margaret will be beaming her chat show direct to camera.

Pretty well every misgiving over *The Family* comes to a head in the consideration of another famous incident, the daughter Heather's session with a schools careers adviser. Colin Young quotes diametrically opposed reactions from one journalist siding with Heather's indifference to everything that is proposed to her, another deploring it. He adds himself that the scene has become almost obligatory in any study of contemporary schools. A sociologist, Colin Bell, who took part both in the *In Vision* discussion at the end of the run and in a further retrospect last October (*Both Sides of The Family*, BBC-2) claimed that at last one was seeing the contempt with which a working class girl was treated by the educational system, in which he included the careers advisory service.

Exactly what is contemptuous about a mild and doubtless obligatory suggestion that there might be advantages in staying on at school another year, likewise placing one or two other possibilities before the girl, is not clear to me. But let that be. Let us speculate merely upon the circumstances of the scene. It occurred in Episode 5, by which time Heather would have become acclimatised to filming and probably quite knowing about acting up—or acting down—the role she saw for herself in any situation.

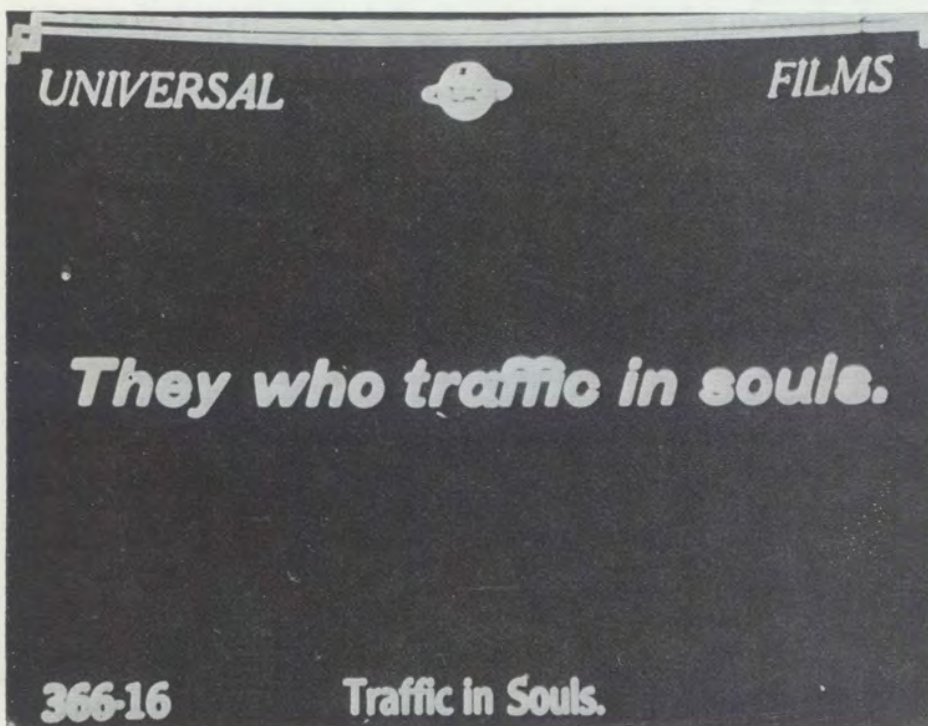
According to the production/transmission cycle given by Colin Young, the careers adviser could have seen the first episode and conceivably the second, depending on which day of the week she interviewed Heather. She was still being plunged into the deep end of the pool of conventions used in *The Family*, the end in which you pretend the camera isn't there and give a performance of yourself going about the common round, the daily task, which as anyone will know who has had to try, can be as daunting as playing Hedda Gabler. What pressures had she invented for herself knowing the interview was to be seen by millions? Did she feel it should be especially 'typical'? More businesslike than usual or less? Did she try to speed things up or spin them out? We don't know. We don't know any of these things. We simply distrust the claim, implicit or explicit, that this was in any way a more reliable facsimile of how people behave than *Crossroads* or *Coronation Street*. (Incidentally it wasn't much of a compliment to his subject on Young's part to choose as fictional opponents of *The Family* these two tired and introverted soap operas.)

If we take fiction as one end of a spectrum of possible ways of depicting people's lives and what might be called the activity-documentary as the other, the demand made upon the viewer is equally straightforward. In fiction he enters into a conspiracy as old as story-telling, and which I needn't elaborate here. In the activity-documentary the individual is there principally to carry out the activity which is the subject of the film. Jenny Barraclough's *The Bomb Disposal Men* is the most recent example as I write, and a good one. There was no question of being asked to form an opinion of the Captain or the W.O.II outside the context of their hazardous job. Personality only leaked round the edges of the silhouette.

Between these borders lies an infinity of middle ways, though I suggest that there is a pull towards the side lanes which is proper and deserves to be respected. During the run of *The Family*, *Sunley's Daughter* (Yorkshire) came along in a line of excellent if somewhat Mary Webbish documentaries of rural life made by Barry Cockcroft, each one taking a different stance to its subject. Here it was comparatively intimate territory (the lady's banked-down love-life, her dour father) and in order to avoid the strains of self-acting altogether Cockcroft made it loudly clear that television was a party to proceedings, even having a reporter to put questions. *Blooming Youth* was the repeat broadcast of Leslie Blair's engaging 'improvisation' of student life for 'Play for Today'. That it was 'devised' and directed by Blair and not written, that the actors were partly improvising from their own experience, does not alter the fact that all concerned were part of the same old drama conspiracy; they were caught up in a sequence of events which had an imposed shape. We have to accept that truth is created just as much as news or history or gossip are created. To use 'real' people rather than actors, to observe directly on to camera rather than by accumulated observation, confers absolutely no special authenticity whatsoever. ■

Traffic in Souls

Robert C. Allen



Notices in the New York press attracted a crowd of several thousand to Weber's Theatre on Broadway on the afternoon of November 24th 1913. Even granting the exaggerations of its publicists, this was no ordinary movie. Weber's had been converted from a theatre to a movie house to accommodate the film, which at six reels was three times as long as most of its competitors. Not only were people willing to stand in line for hours to be among the first to see *Traffic in Souls*, they were willing to pay the then exorbitant admission price of twenty-five cents.

Public notice of the film began with a small article in the *New York Times* of November 3rd 1913. Universal Pictures announced the completion of a film made from the Rockefeller Report on white slavery—an investigation precipitated by claims that thousands of innocent girls were being forced into prostitution by a network of procurers. The film's producers promised that their new release would 'depict vividly the inner workings of the vice interests in New York City.' It had been prepared to 'present the white slave peril to provide a lesson and warning to young girls.' Thousands of young girls must have felt themselves endangered. The exhibitors took in \$5,000 the first week. Within a month *Traffic in Souls* was playing at twenty-eight theatres in New York alone, and Universal had made forty prints for a roadshow tour. The film was eventually to earn \$450,000.

Other producers were moved to altruism by the success of *Traffic in Souls*, and within two months New York screens were filled with 'moral warnings', exposés of 'the lure and vile temptation of the city,' and exhortations of 'the power of resistance in the virtue of a good woman.' *Traffic in Souls* had fathered a whole new genre, the white slave picture. But in time the lines dwindled, the film was replaced at Weber's by its imitators, and even the genre passed out of vogue. Bereft of value, prints of the film were discarded, allowed to disintegrate, or consumed by the fires which plagued the storage of highly volatile nitrate film stock. By the 1930s, when Lewis Jacobs was compiling his social history of the American cinema, *The Rise of the American Film*, he could talk of *Traffic in Souls* as 'a sensation throughout the country' and discuss critical reaction to it, but he could say very little of the film itself—there were no prints of it to be found. It was believed to have become part of the 85 per cent of the American silent film heritage which we euphemistically call 'lost'.

A few years ago, several dozen reels of old film were found among the effects of a Minnesota lumber camp film exhibitor. Six reels seemed to have been particularly popular—the sprocket holes on both sides had been ripped away in places. The reels were purchased by the Blackhawk Film Company of Davenport, Iowa, and when they were carefully unwound, *Traffic in Souls* was viewed for the first time in over fifty years. The film was found to be in good condition and virtually complete. The print was carefully restored, and today film historians can see for themselves what all



'Traffic in Souls': temptation in the candy store; Mary (Jane Gail) discovers the dictagraph

the fuss was about on November 24th, 1913.

What we would have seen that November afternoon in Weber's Theatre can be summarised as follows. Mary Barton (Jane Gail), fiancée of police officer Burke (Matt Moore), and her sister (Ethel Grandin), leave for work in a New York candy store, to support themselves and their invalid inventor father. This domestic scene in the somewhat shabby Barton apartment is contrasted with a similar scene in the elegant household of William Trubus, a dapper gentleman with the mysterious title of 'The Man Higher Up'. Trubus leaves his wife, daughter and butler for his job as director of the International Purity and Reform League. In another office 'The Go-Between' coordinates the activities of his band of white slavers. Trubus passes this office on the way up to his own and smiles knowingly. The meaning of the smile is made clear when he pulls earphones from a drawer in his desk and monitors the office below through a dictagraph, the forerunner of the office intercom. 'The Man Higher Up' is using his position as reform leader to mask his more lucrative business—a white slave syndicate.

'The Go-Between' sends his henchmen out to watch for likely victims. They succeed in luring two Swedish immigrants and a woman just off the train from the country to one of their brothels. Fortunately, an alert Officer Burke witnesses the kidnapping and captures the slavers. But even as Burke saves three innocent victims, another of the gang plots the ruin of his own fiancée's sister. The handsome cad approaches Mary's sister in the candy store and invites her out to dinner. He drugs her drink and carries her to the back room of a brothel, where she wakes to find a stout madame trying to remove her clothes. Mary loses her job because of the publicity following her sister's disappearance, but with a luck only possible in the silent cinema she is immediately hired as William Trubus' secretary. She has hardly begun her new job when she discovers the dictagraph and overhears the voice of the man who kidnapped her sister. With the help of Burke and her father's invention for 'intensifying sound waves and recording dictagraph sounds on a phonograph record,' she secures the evidence needed to bring Trubus and his slavers to justice.

Meanwhile, Burke follows one of the gang to the brothel where Mary's sister is being held. He leads the police raid on the brothel, kills the luckless girl's tormentor, who is now about to horsewhip her into removing her clothes, and returns her to the arms of her sister and father. Trubus, entertaining the parents of his daughter's fiancé, is confronted with the evidence and arrested. Released on bail, he returns home to find his wife has died—either, one assumes, from a broken heart or from public humiliation before her daughter's future in-laws.

While *Traffic in Souls* may seem to us laughably melodramatic, to its 1913 audience it was much more than an ordinary crime drama. Its theme, the sinister menace to American womanhood of well organised bands of white slavers, had in 1913 become the subject of what the *New York World* called a popular 'hysteria'. Since the beginning of the century, New Yorkers had been

regaled by white slavery reports in the popular press. A number of government and quasi-official investigations had been set up, and while unable to substantiate claims of 30,000 innocent girls a year lured to fates worse than death, they did leave the question sufficiently open for those inclined to believe the worst to do so. Vigilance Committees sprang up all over the country, announcing 'Only the omnipotent God is equal to the task at hand.' Reform and purity organisations jumped on the white slave bandwagon, and a few of the more enterprising reformers made careers of exposing what they claimed was an international white slave syndicate. In response to public indignation at New York becoming the vice capital of the world, a special grand jury, headed by John D. Rockefeller Jr., was appointed in 1910 to investigate.

The direct antecedents of *Traffic in Souls* were attempts to make the New York stage a forum for discussion of the horrors of vice. Early in 1913 the French dramatist Eugène Brieux's play *Damaged Goods*, about the effects of venereal disease, ran for many months. It was followed by other 'frank revelations of vice as horrible examples to keep theatre-goers in the straight and narrow path,' as the *Literary Digest* called them. Several plays, notably *The Flight* and *The Lure*, dealt specifically with white slavery and caused a particular furore. Then in June 1913, while the theatre debate intensified, there was published the long awaited report on prostitution by John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s Bureau of Social Hygiene, an outgrowth of his work on the grand jury. Entitled *Commercialized Prostitution in New York City*, the Rockefeller Report was claimed to be the basis of *Traffic in Souls*. In fact, the report devoted little space to white slavery. Its most controversial aspect was the presentation of a good case for the inseparability of extensive prostitution and rampant police corruption. Far from being based on the report, *Traffic in Souls* actually contradicts it. White slavery is seen in the film as a highly efficient business enterprise of immense



'Traffic in Souls': white slavers and victims; the downfall of 'The Man Higher Up'

proportions, and it is the police, led by incorruptible Officer Burke, who expose the slavers and save Mary's sister.

Far more plausible as sources for the film are the vice plays and the works of the more ardent social reformers. The plot vehicle of an innocent girl tricked into a brothel by a cunning procurer and rescued by a handsome government agent at the moment of most severe duress was hardly originated by *Traffic in Souls*; it formed the basis of both *The Flight* and *The Lure*. Striking parallels with the film's view of white slavery can be found in the National Vigilance Committee's monthly organ *Vigilance* and in the writings of some of the more zealous reformers, such as Edward O. Janney (*The White Slave Traffic in America*, 1911) and Clifford Roe (*The Great War on*

White Slavery, 1911). The warnings of the reformers often outdid the plays in detailing the sinister deceptions of the gangs and the unspeakable though highly readable fates which awaited their victims.

'Mildred, sore and weak, was lying on her side... As she looked up into the angry face before her, hoping against hope that some touch of pity would lighten the countenance of her tormentor, Clarence put his hand in his pocket and drew out the finger of a woman.'

'Look here,' he said, 'this is the finger of the last one who tried to get away.'—Clifford Roe, *The Great War on White Slavery*.

One explanation for the efforts to link the film with the Rockefeller Report is that the promoters of *Traffic in Souls* were simply using a well known name and document to advertise their product. A stronger motivation emerges, however, when *Traffic in Souls* is viewed in relation to its stage predecessors. Despite the popular appeal of the vice plays, they also drew strong attacks in the press. The most effective protection against court or police action available to the producer or theatre owner was to attach to the play the blessing or outright sponsorship of a respected reform organisation. *Damaged Goods* had been financed by the Sociological Fund of the *Medical Review of Reviews*. To other plays were linked the International Woman's Suffrage Association, Florence Crittendon Missions, the Women's Political Union, even Rockefeller's Bureau of Social Hygiene. So it was only natural for *Traffic in Souls*, which followed closely on the theatre controversy, to have used Rockefeller's name, particularly since the cinema was at the time considered by some as not much more than a vulgar sideshow amusement.

In 1913, with the powerful Motion Picture Patents Company, the so-called Trust, still providing strong opposition to the feature film, the standard fare was still the one and two-reeler. One of the companies turning out this staple diet of short, quickly made films was Carl Laemmle's Imp Pictures (Independent Motion Pictures Companies), the production division of Laemmle's more famous company, the Universal Film Manufacturing Company. Laemmle, the major independent producer in America and a constant thorn in the side of the Trust, had in his employ a young actor-director, George Loane Tucker. Inspired by the vice plays, Tucker decided that the time was right for a feature length photo-play on white slavery. He discussed the idea with the chief Imp editor, Jack Cohn (later to become vice-president of Columbia), who was enthusiastic about the plan and urged Tucker to discuss it with Laemmle. Tucker asked his boss for a \$5,000 budget, enough for a dozen regular Imp films. Laemmle, more concerned with holding his business together than with the pictures it produced, rejected the plan.

The timely departure of the studio manager to England prompted Tucker to ask four friends to put up the money for the film, which he would make surreptitiously. He finished it in four weeks, shooting around a regular production schedule and on odd bits of extra film stock. Before the film could be edited, however,

Tucker quarrelled with Imp brass over another matter and left for England and the London Film Company. Cohn, working at night behind locked doors, edited *Traffic in Souls* from ten reels to six and took it to Laemmle, who still had no idea that the film existed. Laemmle agreed to view the film, but—caught up in a business squabble—argued in the projection room throughout the viewing. Now afraid that he would be called on to ask his friends for the \$1,000 none of them could spare, Cohn begged Laemmle for a second chance. Terry Ramsaye records how the fate of *Traffic in Souls* was decided:

'The film fared better on its next showing. It was admitted to be a picture. But there was a big question as to what might be done with it. The Universal program was made up of one and two-reel subjects. This was a six-reeler. No motion picture theatre of the day considered such a monstrosity... The situation was further complicated by the internal politics of Universal. The opponents of Laemmle were charging him with having squandered the company's money on a fool director's fool idea. Investigation proved that *Traffic in Souls* had cost \$5,700.'

It became the text of a violent meeting of the board of directors.

'All right, I'll take the picture off the company's hands and pay \$10,000 for it,' shouted Laemmle. Then came a lull, a whispering in conference. Dire suspicion rose in the opposition. 'If you'll put up ten thousand it must be worth a million,' taunted the opposition, crying a bid of \$25,000. This resulted in the picture remaining the property of Universal.'

One of the first films to claim endorsements as moral sanctions, a key work in the development of the feature film, the originator of a film genre, a springboard for the career of an important though nearly forgotten American director—but most of the above could have been discovered by any film historian without ever seeing the film. Now that we can see it again, *Traffic in Souls* emerges as a film which can be compared with the best of American pre-war production. Perhaps its most striking aspect is its use of parallel editing, the cutting together of several plot lines to suggest simultaneous action. The entire narrative of the film is presented in this way. In addition to compressing the many events of the plot into a seventy-two hour time frame, this editing technique has two other functions. One is the enhancing of suspense, as when the attempts of Mary's sister's kidnappers to force her to remove her clothes and don the skimpy 'parlour gown' are cross-cut with the arrival of the police at the brothel; at the crucial moment Mary's sister is saved from the bullwhip as Officer Burke charges into the room.

Parallel editing also allows simultaneous events to comment on each other. In a sequence depicting the night Mary's sister is abducted, we are first shown the victim pulling vainly at the bars on the window of her room. This scene, and shots of Mary informing her father of her sister's disappearance, is then intercut with 'the peaceful and happy good night of the head of the infamous system'—Trubus enjoying his after-dinner coffee in his ornate home.

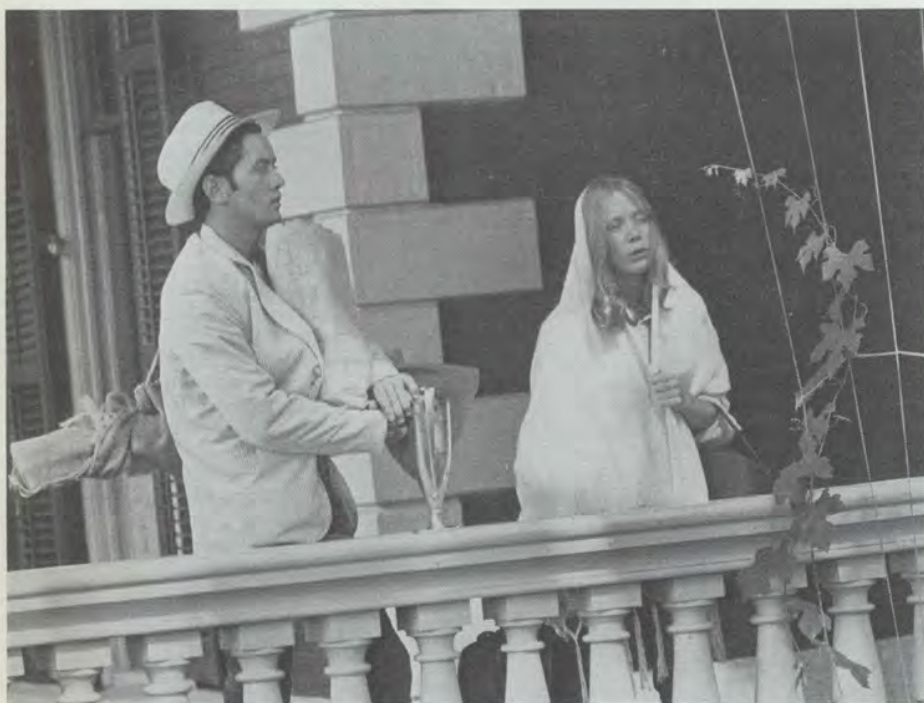
Editing technique is not the only reason *Traffic in Souls* is still viewable. The

interior sets are convincing, and there is much exterior location work. Of the almost ninety titles in the film, few if any are superfluous and many are worked into the plot as newspaper headlines, notes or telegrams. The acting of the large cast is surprisingly restrained, given the melodramatic nature of the narrative, with Ethel Grandin, who became well-known as the star of several serials, particularly effective as the naive victim of the slavers.

Although Terry Ramsaye in *A Million and One Nights* says that it was *Traffic in Souls* which discovered the box-office value of sex, it was not this film but some of its imitators (which for 1914 were quite explicit) which caused the term 'white slave film' to become synonymous with exploitation. *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic*, which opened in December 1913, was closed several times, and its producer, a self-appointed vice investigator named Samuel H. London, was convicted of presenting an indecent exhibition and corrupting public morals. From the two reels of the film which survive one can see that London's mistake was to present explicitly what *Traffic in Souls* had only suggested: scenes actually shot in red light districts, prostitutes plying their trade along recognisable streets in New York, and extensive use of the interior of 'parlour houses'. *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* and other vice films were responsible for this blanket condemnation of the genre in *Moving Picture World*: 'They are intended to stimulate and exploit the morbid interest in the harrowing details of a sickening and revolting aberration of the human soul.' Unfortunately, we know few of the 'harrowing details' of such films as *The House of Bondage*, *The Exposure of the White Slave Traffic*, *A Victim of Sin*, *Yellow Passport*, *Cocaine Traffic* or *Smashing the Vice Trust—Moving Picture World* and *Variety* both refused to advertise or review white slave films after February 1914 on the grounds that they were 'injurious to the public.' Perhaps it was unpleasant memories of this time which led to the specific injunction against white slave films in the Hollywood production code of 1922.

American film historians have noted, if not fully acknowledged, the importance of *Traffic in Souls*. The contributions of the film's director have been all but forgotten. Between 1914 and 1917 Tucker both directed and produced for the London Film Company, and eventually he was made studio manager. Among the films he directed were the very successful features *The Middleman* and *The Manxman*, and an early Allied propaganda effort, *England Expects*. When the London Film Company folded in 1917, Tucker returned to the United States and made films for Universal and Goldwyn. In 1919 he made *The Miracle Man*, which made stars of its principals, Betty Compson, Thomas Meighan and Lon Chaney. *The Miracle Man* put Tucker among the foremost American directors, and is credited with 'exercising profound influence in raising the status of the director.' The promise Tucker had shown in the film was not to be realised. Already ill when he made *The Miracle Man*, Tucker died in 1921, without, it is said, ever seeing *Traffic in Souls*. ■

Film REVIEWS



'Badlands': Martin Sheen and Sissy Spacek

Badlands

'Until this summer it had been an ordinary street where they stole peaches, plums and apricots, each in its day. But late in August, while they were monkey-climbing for the sourest apples, the "thing" happened which changed the houses, the taste of the fruit, and the very air within the gossiping trees.' Ray Bradbury's highly charged descriptions of the traumas of childhood, his antic creation of Gothic landscapes in placid mid-America, might more closely approximate than anything in the cinema the vibrant prose-poetry and exalted style of Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (Columbia-Warner).

The comparison is suggested not only by the closeness of textures, a rich, dark and strange melding of fantasy, allegory and local detail, but also by an uncanny pairing of scenes in which, just after her 'Teen-Romance' sweetheart Kit (Martin Sheen) has disposed of her interfering father, Holly (Sissy Spacek) stands alone at night behind a window in her ominously gabled home, and looks glazedly out at two boys loitering on a street corner—the youthful heroes, possibly, from *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, nervously contemplating the vista of Hickory Street, where the 'thing' occurred that brought about such tremulous changes in the world.

Bradbury's 'gossiping trees' also recur in the remarkable sequence of the runaway couple's sojourn in the forest: the conventional idyll deliciously treated as nursery rhyme, fable and voyage of discovery. 'There wasn't a plant in the forest that didn't come in handy,' intones Holly's narration as the camera sweeps through undergrowth and down a wild river as beautiful and foreboding as the waterway to an imaginary

kingdom in *Aguirre—Wrath of God* (the signs of resident animal life and of the passing of men are anthologised by *Badlands* with some of the mystery of Werner Herzog). Kit spends his time constructing a defence system of medieval complexity; and Holly's adaptation to her environment takes in readings from *Kon-Tiki*, a shiver of mortality when she looks at a picture through the stereopticon of her signpainter father and muses, 'Where would I be at this moment if Kit had never met me?', and finally a claim to mystical communion when she hears the various sounds of the forest as 'spirits whispering about all the things that were worrying them.'

It is the extraordinary suggestive qualities of *Badlands*—the tension between its limpid visuals and busily descriptive after-the-fact narration, with colour and detail by courtesy, alternately, of *True Confessions* and *Reader's Digest*—which complicate the way it might otherwise slip, given the simplicity of its story and the familiarity of its material, into a matrix of other movies. Like *Targets* and *The Sugarland Express*, it is based on an actual event, the motiveless killing spree undertaken in the late 1950s, and around the fringes of the territory covered here, by one Charles Starkweather and his girlfriend Carol Ann Fugate. Like *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Dillinger*, it is not only about myths in the making and breaking, but about the myth-making and media consciousness of the protagonists themselves. Holly's narration evidently serves as an equivalent of the ballad which Penn's Bonnie Parker sends to the papers, and her relationship with Kit seems to hinge on seeing him as her very own James Dean.

For his part, Kit invokes the necessity, if he is to play the part of doomed individualist to the hilt, of having a girl in attendance to 'scream

his name' when he dies. He is actually granted a more modest, though no less thoroughly enjoyed apothlosis, when he stands, elaborately manacled, to hand out souvenirs to an audience of state police and national guardsmen—a scene which Malick steers humorously clear of any Christ-like metaphor. He also manages to bring off, with an ironic but direct and unfussy treatment, those dangerous scenes where he gives both a literal and a figurative 'lift' to the story—Holly's ascent by police helicopter from the plains of Montana after she has arbitrarily decided to abandon the fairytale odyssey; and Kit's final plane ride to glory as Holly summarises the subsequent trial, how Kit was sentenced to die, and how 'on a warm spring night, after donating his body to science, he did.'

But where *Targets* made what point it could by winding up a bland mass murderer and setting him loose in a bland urban environment, *Badlands* suggests a more mysterious traffic between the super-active imagination of the morally innocent and their entirely casual, unpremeditated killings. Holly confesses her initial surprise that Kit—sauntering away from his garbage collection route to find her twirling a drill-team baton on a shady lawn—should have been interested in her: 'As I'd never been popular in school and I didn't have much personality.' But this unprepossessingly opaque heroine, filtering all their experiences through the language of fan-magazine fiction, even comprehending and accepting her companion's madness, remains beguilingly—and not just insensitively—innocent. Her narration, by turns naive and calculated, homespun and sophisticated, perceptive and sentimental, also reveals areas of her life that remain inviolate, untouched either by her 'love' for Kit or by the murders. Leaving Kit alone at one point, Holly wanders outside, finding herself too deep in contemplation even to think about their plight: 'The world was like a faraway planet to which I could never return... full of things to be looked into.'

More evidently a bundle of contradictions, Kit enters the picture as a footloose symbol of freedom, a rebel without a cause simply by virtue of his looks, and turns out to be the most pragmatic of romantics, wholly bound by the rules of the game (apparently derived from sources little different from Holly's reading matter—vide his verdict on the killing of three men who come hunting for them in the forest: 'with lawmen it would have been different; they would be out there to get a job done and they deserved a chance. But not a bounty hunter'). The social misfit who snatches Holly from her home and leads her in a wild pilgrimage to some secret country of the North is, paradoxically, the most sternly socialising influence in her life, insisting that she take her school-books along so that she won't fall behind and suggesting, as his only idea on what he might actually do when they reach Canada, that he will probably join the Mounties. As law-maker and monument-builder, putting together a little cairn of stones to mark the spot where he is captured, Kit is linked in manifold ways to the relics of his time. He begins the movie as a garbage collector, and is first seen coming upon the body of a dead dog, to which is soon added a pet fish and another dog—an accumulation of flotsam which seems to take the sting out of Kit's own slaughters and lends peculiar strength to his assumption that there is order and justice in the passing, however violently, of all life. He automatically rescues an old toaster from the basement where he hides the body of Holly's father, and takes ample furniture for their own forest home before setting fire to the house; and when possessions finally become an encumbrance he buries them ('Someone might dig them up a thousand years from now, and wouldn't they wonder'). Holly, in fact, travels no great distance when she passes from her father's care into Kit's—the two men coming

together just once before the shooting, in front of the giant billboard which the father (Warren Oates) is decorating as a crowded canvas of domestic harmony, and will leave behind as his memorial and vision of order in the otherwise featureless plain.

In high, wide and handsome (and also very contemporary) style, Malick tells his story in scenes that are almost disconnected, self-contained set-pieces, stressing the very casualness of connections as much between the runaway lovers themselves as between them and their crimes. Their alliance is a brief, maladroitness interlocking of lives and fantasies, and might finally have less in common with the current sagas of romantically doomed outlaws than with the mutually cannibalistic fantasies of Noel Black's *Pretty Poison*, where pyromaniac schemer Anthony Perkins is finally consumed by all-American black widow Tuesday Weld.

Refusing to 'explain' the pathology of the crimes in terms of the psychological quirks of the couple, Malick simply builds both into an atmospheric re-creation of the historical times and places of adolescent day-dreams. *Badlands* is a fairytale cum Gothic fantasy cum black comedy about two 'thrill killers' of the 1950s, when murder was as devoid of emotion as it was of meaning or motive, when community fears were more likely to be excited by vague, unperceived foes than by two inadvertent law-breakers, and when a romantic outsider *manqué* like Kit could happily make the best of the status quo, instructing his companion to enjoy the scenery while they pass through the monotonous prairies towards a paradise beckoning in the 'mountains of Saskatchewan'.

RICHARD COMBS

The Parallax View

As the late Richard Hofstadter showed us in his celebrated essay 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics', paranoid thinking has not been confined to conservative circles, though at the time he wrote it (a matter of weeks before the Kennedy assassination) his principal concern was with the Radical Right. Indeed we can see November 1963 in Dallas as marking a watershed for conspiracy thinking in America in general and—my present concern—in Hollywood movies. Twenty years ago, Hollywood was making films in the right-wing paranoid style where the content was left-wing conspiracy. One thinks especially of *The Iron Curtain*, *Big Jim McLain*, *My Son John*, *Hell and High Water*. In the past ten years, the equivalent pictures have been in the left-wing paranoid style with at their centre right-wing conspiracies. Examples are *Seven Days in May*, *Mirage*, *Executive Action* and *The Parallax View*. In the earlier movies the good side was represented by the FBI, the military, simple-minded patriots, the devotees of the free enterprise system; the villains were neurotic intellectuals, soft-hearted academics, sinister foreigners. Almost the reverse is the case in the later pictures. The transition between the two is represented by *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), which contrived by elaborate sleight of hand to link together the extreme right of America with Mao's China in a single conspiracy.

Works of art or entertainment of course tend to favour conspiracy theory simply through their function of imposing patterns upon experience and extracting meaning from it. Our paranoid tendencies are being played upon whenever we are encouraged to shout out in exasperation at the incredulous behaviour of commonsensical citizens: 'Believe him, he's telling you the truth. His village has been taken over by Martians/carnivorous vegetables/giant ants/Russians.' Rarely does a film evidence a commitment to what Thomas Pynchon has called 'anti-paranoia', a belief that there is no connection between events or social phenomena,

that we live in a contingent universe. (A curious exception is Anthony Harvey's *They Might Be Giants*, where a psychotic holy fool, believing himself to be Sherlock Holmes, goes around Manhattan following a series of false clues that make a pattern out of the chaos of modern life.)

The Parallax View (CIC) begins with a pre-credit sequence presenting the assassination of a liberal presidential candidate, Charles Carroll, on the top of the Space Needle Tower in Seattle World's Fairground, and a government-appointed commission reporting their conclusion that Carroll was killed by a single assassin working alone. The main action takes place three years later, when Joseph Frady, an investigative reporter working on a newspaper in the North-West, starts to disinter the Carroll case after most of the witnesses—of whom he is one—have died in what might be regarded as suspicious circumstances. (Warren Beatty plays Frady as a long-haired, shuffling, spiky loner who inevitably recalls the style of the *Washington Post* reporters who broke the Watergate story.)

A series of bizarre encounters and half-clues leads Frady to contact the Parallax Corporation and take their psychological entry test, which seems designed to attract homicidal psychopaths. The unexplained film that is shown to him looks like a vision of the world as seen by James Earl Ray, Arthur Bremer or Lee Harvey Oswald. Around the Corporation's anonymously resplendent Los Angeles premises, he spots a man he recognises as being present at the original killing. Following him to an airport, Frady helps ground an airliner with a bomb aboard and thus saves the life of a liberal politician. Following the assassin a second time to a right-wing jamboree, he witnesses the assassination of a conservative politician, George Hammond, for which he is framed and killed while attempting to escape. Another committee meets and blandly reports that Frady, mentally unhinged through his obsession with the Carroll case, acted alone in shooting Hammond.

The Parallax View is a consistently gripping film that compares favourably with, and often resembles, *Khute*, and restores one's confidence in Alan J. Pakula after the disappointing *Love and Pain*. It does not of course stand up to subsequent inspection as a realistic story, the way *Khute* does. Why, for instance, does a vast organisation of professional killers send the same man to carry out four jobs in the same area? What skilled assassin would choose to stage a murder at the top of the town's highest building from which there was no possible means of escape? Why doesn't Parallax bump off everyone in a manner that looks like death

from natural causes, instead of just those who have been witnesses to their more sensational killings? The answer to these questions is to be found in the film's elaborate visual rhetoric rather than in its skeletal plotting. A film like Dmytryk's *Mirage* (in which Gregory Peck plays an amnesiac scientist reconstructing from a battery of clues the way he became an unwitting assistant in a heinous scheme of the military-industrial complex) ultimately fails and disappoints through dissipating the nightmare. *The Parallax View* never makes this mistake of tying up the loose ends and offering any specific solution. As in *Khute*, the central character moves through an urban labyrinth of undefined and indefinable menace. The shiny glass buildings hint at mysteries within; nothing—as the title suggests—is quite the way it seems.

There is no escape, however. When Beatty goes out into the idyllic countryside of Oregon in search of a fugitive witness, he is first set upon by a brutal deputy and then nearly murdered by a crooked sheriff. This is the same pessimistic double-bind that America's pioneering sociologists first offered in the late 19th century—that rural life would expose you to inevitable corruption and the towns would drive you mad. Or as Michael Lesy put it in *Wisconsin Death Trip*: 'While such theorists were making the land into a swamp of sexual degeneracy, others were transforming the cities into plateaus of nervous decay.'

We never discover what Parallax exists to do, or who runs it. There are two large clues, however, that take us to the centre of the movie's meaning. One is the film that is shown to test applicants. It consists of clusters of images designed both to test and manipulate the viewer's ideas about love, hatred, family, patriotism and so on. At this level Parallax can be seen as the whole system of persuasion and ideological indoctrination that embraces both the entertainment industry and Madison Avenue style politics. The second clue is in the murder for which Frady is framed. We are led to suppose that Parallax is a right-wing organisation working in the interests of those who are staging the rally, at the rehearsal for which Frady is put on the spot. Pakula has deliberately presented Senator Carroll at the film's opening as spontaneous, attractive, charismatic, as opposed to the phony, charmless, repellent Hammond on whom the grisly final rally is centred.

What then are we to infer from the assassination of Hammond? That Parallax will do anything for money? Or that it is working for some crazy consensus? Or is it the objectifica-

'The Parallax View': assassination in Seattle



tion of some appalling national malaise? Despite this last possibility, the picture does not offer any real alternative to some notion of conspiracy. Or at least not a sufficiently valid one to prevent *The Parallax View* being not only a film about paranoia but in itself a deeply paranoid film. This is its strength as a disturbing entertainment, and its weakness as a truly valuable contribution to an understanding of contemporary American society.

PHILIP FRENCH

La Maman et la Putain

'The day I stop suffering, I'll have become someone else.' 'There's no such thing as chance.' 'To speak with the words of others—that's what I'd like. That's what freedom must be.' From the Café aux Deux Magots to the adjacent Flore, from the streets and sidewalks of a greyish Paris to other people's flats, for the better part of 219 minutes, Alexandre (Jean-Pierre Léaud) continues to hold forth. 'In May '68 a whole café was crying. It was beautiful. A tear-gas bomb had exploded... a crack in reality opened up.' Charming, narcissistically, elaborately, endlessly: 'I don't do anything; I let time do it.' 'Abortionists are the new Robin Hoods... the scalpel replaces the sword.' 'The world will be saved by children, soldiers...' (pregnant pause) 'and fools.'

Much less talkative is his beloved Gilberte (Isabelle Weingarten—a Bresson discovery back for another non-performance), who forsakes him to get married, and Marie (Bernadette Lafont), the older woman he lives with, casually exploits, and is clothed and fed by. But a verbal match of sorts is offered by the doleful and doe-like Veronika (Françoise Lebrun, in an extraordinary, glowing debut), a promiscuous nurse he picks up one afternoon. Next to Alexandre's, her words come across as blunt and unvarnished. 'I can fuck anyone.' 'Watch out—you'll push in my Tampax.' 'I've screwed a maximum of Arabs and Jews.' While serving Nescafé: 'I like the feel of a prick against my ass, even if it's soft. One sugar or two?' And in a long drunken soliloquy tainted with death and despair, tears and mascara streaking down her cheeks: 'There are no whores... Love is nothing if you don't want a baby together.'

Central to the feel and method of Jean Eustache's *The Mother and the Whore* (Gala) is its obsessive confessional tone, much closer to Pialat than to Rohmer; its slavish fidelity—apart from some time abridgements—to repetitious verisimilitude; its sense of private ghosts being desperately laid to rest. (The ghostly fades between sequences conjure up spectral memories of Murnau as much as the beautiful scene at the Gare de Lyon restaurant, where Alexandre compares the setting to a Murnau film, a locus of transitions.)

In barest outline, boy meets whore, courts her—a crucial shift of operations from Deux Magots to Flore, with each successive date set at an earlier hour—and eventually beds her in Marie's flat while the latter is away in London. Marie returns, he introduces Veronika, and abortive attempts at a three-way sleeping arrangement culminate in Marie's attempted suicide, Alexandre's reduction to self-loathing and manic helplessness (retreating to the bathroom in the midst of an emotional crisis to spray himself with cologne), and Veronika's convulsive lament for the emptiness of her many sexual exploits. She insists on going home and Alexandre accompanies her, listens to more drunken abuse ('You disgust me. I may be pregnant by you. I love you'), leaves, and then hurries back to propose marriage. She accepts, vomits offscreen into a basin, and we end with the camera fixed on Léaud, stunned and slumped on the floor against her refrigerator. It is less a resolution of conflict than a depletion—an exhaustion of the will which seems (like



'La Maman et la Putain': Jean-Pierre Léaud, Françoise Lebrun

the characters) more prone to regurgitate sickness than reflect upon it.

Yet obstinately and paradoxically, this monumental epic of psychic imprisonment sticks in one's craw. Refusing to see beyond the characters and their limitations, the film repeatedly pushes us back into their snarled and messy lives. Encased in the retrospective black-and-white ambience of Nouvelle Vague—when Léaud was Antoine Doinel, or *Masculin-Féminin*'s Paul, or the provincial hero of Eustache's earlier *Le Père Noël a les Yeux Bleus*—the film turns these youthful dreams into bitter ashes. Formally the antithesis of Rivette's *Out 1: Spectre* in its exclusively written dialogue and old-fashioned narrative linkage, it carries a bleak mood that is equally redolent of post-1968 disillusionment, and similarly suggestive of vicious concentric circles.

Over the plot's relentlessly even progression, Alexandre's non-stop aphorisms cumulatively take on the appearance of habitual camouflaging gestures. (Eustache wrote the part expressly for Léaud, and it is clearly a character that both of them understand down to their bones.) And the mounting impact of Veronika's obscenity and sarcasm—evaluating her body parts like a used car salesman—ultimately turns, for all its levelling effect, into another kind of cant and cliché, offering no promise of release.

Static medium shots of people talking: a zero point of cinematic style, perhaps, but Eustache holds to it with such precision that the slightest pan—Veronika's reproachful greeting of Alexandre defining a quick trajectory across a room—carries an unusual weight. Elsewhere, it defines a neutral surface on which faces, voices and words (the latter two rendered in direct sound) are made to register as epiphanies, regardless of what they say or do.

'The film begins in the first person,' Eustache has noted, 'in order to end in several first persons.' Specifically, a strict adherence to the hero's field of vision is veered from only twice. The last time we see Marie, after the others' departure, she is listening to a scratchy Edith Piaf record—the static camera recording her own virtual stasis for the song's duration. As much of a climax as the tirade by Veronika that immediately precedes it, this shot similarly composes a definitive 'still-life', with the ironic lilt of Piaf's song ('Les Amants de Paris') serving as a mock epitaph. Soon afterwards, we glimpse Veronika changing into her bathrobe before Alexandre enters her room to propose—

a more academic and less striking demonstration of the same principle, that Alexandre's glib overview and control of events has been irrevocably broken.

And what has replaced it? Taking apart a social-ethical system to show us its bleeding entrails, Eustache makes no effort to sew it up again. The female roles indicated in the film's title have been invested with enough ambiguity to suggest a reversal—Veronika becoming the expectant mother, Marie the abandoned whore—but not enough to suggest that any alternative roles might exist. Freedom collapses—helped along by a few shallow cracks Alexandre makes about Sartre, sitting at a nearby café table—and life reverts to Catholic bourgeois 'necessity', which is implicitly treated as biological truth. Nouvelle Vague dies an ignominious death, and the spirits (if not the minds) of Claudes Berri, Sautet and Lelouch lurch to the fore.

Perhaps this is overstating the case; but as a view of cinema as well as a view of life, *La Maman et la Putain* seems to me profoundly reactionary. This is already hinted at in the jokey treatment of Alexandre's idle friend, whose cluttered room with stolen wheelchair and Nazi memorabilia suggests a fascist playpen; or in the nostalgic use throughout of old records, reflections of yearnings for the presumed certainties and absolutes of the past. And yet, like *Long Day's Journey into Night*, like the better parts of *Ice* or *Faces*, the film's compulsive picking at wounds reveals a genuine impasse, a tragic lack in ourselves that cinema seldom admits, much less describes—a cry of animal defeat lending Eustache's essentially destructive masterpiece a scarred authenticity that sears the mind and persistently haunts the emotions.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

California Split

In the remarkable unbroken panning shot at the beginning of *Thieves Like Us*—with the convicts glimpsed at the start of its parabola suggesting the inevitable consequence of the criminal action with which it ends—Robert Altman implies an ineluctable fate awaiting his heroes in their attempt to play outlaw to society. By contrast, the opening of *California Split* (Columbia-Warner) is almost wilfully fragmented and fussy; and one doesn't go far wrong if one assumes by analogy that here, however oddly in a film which focuses on the



'California Split': George Segal, Elliott Gould

obsessive nature of gambling, freedom of choice is the name of the game.

Amid the spacious yet somehow constricting amenities of a Californian casino, Charlie Waters (Elliott Gould) is wandering like a lost soul, awaiting a place at the poker tables. Idly he inserts a coin in a machine, which obliges with an illustrated lecture on the history of gambling. As he comments on the commentary, and its images mingle with the film's while the credit titles unfold, the confusion inherent in the sight of a roomful of gamblers absorbed in their variously mysterious pursuits gradually increases until one is conditioned for the total claustrophobia of the second sequence, set in a funeral bar where Charlie, having been ejected on suspicion of cheating, meets Bill Denny (George Segal), who fled as a consequence of the same incident, and the pair of them cement their comradeship by getting drunk and trying to catalogue Snow White's seven dwarfs to the accompaniment of a tirade of woe from two gogo dancers.

The starting point of that gambling travelogue we are treated to by Charlie's coin, illustrated by a still of grim-faced Western gambler-gunmen calling the shots, is that times have changed. For a while, with Charlie and Bill accused of being in partnership to defraud, both of them making hasty exits, and Charlie being subsequently mugged by his victim, it looks as though Altman disagrees. In a succession of persistently claustrophobic settings, which suggest a world running parallel to everyday life on different time and moral scales (typically, Charlie and Bill seek refuge after the mugging with two callgirls, whereupon everybody formally breakfasts and retires to bed with the curtains drawn against the daylight), he sets his two heroes on a Dostoevskian road to disaster. Yet unexpectedly, against all the rules, they not only emerge sane, healthy and the richer by \$41,000 apiece, but prove in the process that they are absolutely free of any obsession about the gambling that obsesses them.

In this film about chance, chance is the absolute ruler. Charlie and Bill happen to meet because someone mistakenly assumes they are partners; they happen to strike up a partnership because Charlie (the professional gambler) needs cheering up from a run of bad luck, and Bill (the family man) needs cheering up after an unhappy separation from his wife; and they happen to win because professional Charlie leaves the gambling to

amateur Bill because he thinks the latter is riding a streak of luck, and because Bill realises in time that what he took to be a 'special feeling' of inspiration was in fact nothing more than a streak of luck. Altman underwrites the notion of chance by giving the film a casually improvised surface which seems to obey no law but the need to let a gag run its course and then top itself with another irrelevancy. Lying in bed in the callgirls' flat, for instance, Charlie is still muttering darkly to himself 'Happy, Bashful, Doc...' and coming (albeit delightfully) to the same dead end in Disneyland as he had before. And when the two callgirls casually vanish to an assignment in Hawaii, one feels that they were introduced in the first place mainly to furnish an excuse for the outrageously funny interlude in which Charlie and Bill pose as vice squad officers to get rid of the elderly transvestite who has hired the girls for an evening of women's talk.

Yet under its *MASH*-like surface, *California Split* reveals a very distinct structure radiating from two hidden backbones. One is the relationship between Charlie and Bill, which plays happily—unlike *MASH*, where Gould and Sutherland could have exchanged roles—on the conflicting personalities of the two stars. Where Elliott Gould is the wild eccentric reacting to the improbable with imperturbably calm familiarity, George Segal is his exact opposite, ordinary man threatening to splinter into hysteria at the onset of the unexpected. And as Gould's Mad Hatter conducts Segal's Alice through California's nighttown, one begins to glimpse the irony: whereas crazy Charlie, the quintessential loner, effortlessly establishes stable relationships with the shreds of humanity that drift past him, Bill is so intent on the necessity of recapturing the emotional security which has deserted him along with his wife that he is unable to maintain any relationship at all, ultimately rejecting even Charlie's proffered friendship.

It is in this, and not in his gambling—which in Charlie's case assures his freedom—that Bill is obsessed; and it is in this that he contributes to the second structural backbone of the film: the omnipresence of obsession. When Bill and Charlie first meet in the nightclub, Altman suddenly interposes another character, a woman pouring out complaints to the barman, who effectively blocks them from the camera. The formality, indeed the insistence with which he does so, suggests that—as so often in his films—he means us to be less

attentive to his heroes than to the flora and fauna that strew their path. And as in *The Long Goodbye*, he presents an extraordinary, entomological study of a section of society whose common denominator is a determination to get away from the routine of work, home and sleep, and whose characteristic is the ability to become trapped in some form of meaningless routine.

Picked out individually from the tableau of somnambulistic gamblers, racetrack mobs, boxing-match spectators and after-hours muggers, they obliviously mark time on their sad treadmill: the ageing transvestite with nowhere to go, the young whore (Gwen Welles) who falls in love with every client, her older friend (Ann Prentiss) who picks up the pieces after each disillusionment, and a whole gallery of ladies of easy virtue chorusing the difficulty of living. It is central to the film, and characteristic of its sense of people walking down their own tramlines, that when the paths of Bill and the young whore cross for a brief moment of tender promise, each is so mindful of his own image (her availability, his propriety) that they can do nothing but diverge.

TOM MILNE

Aguirre, Wrath of God

All Werner Herzog's fictions evince a fascination with the mechanisms of human madness—especially those engendered by the will to power—and yet the uniquely disturbing quality of his movies seems to spring less from this consistent theme than from a central ambivalence. Like one who at once observes and participates, Herzog balances between two positions, offering both lucid analyses of chaotic situations (undertaken in a spirit not unlike that of scientific research) and hallucinatory, seductive visions that plunge his audience into active experience of the irrational.

The analytic strain is, of course, a modernist trait; it yields the entomological metaphors of *Signs of Life*, the dislocations of physical scale in *Even Dwarfs Started Small*, and the entirety of *Fata Morgana* as a catalogue of the debris left in the wake of a 'drama' already played out, the latter establishing an improbable rapport between Herzog and certain contemporary avant-garde film-makers. The strain of irrationality, though, draws on a very much older tradition; it conjures the dark undertow of the German Romantics, immanent in many of Caspar David Friedrich's landscapes and explicit in a novella like Eichendorff's archetypal *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts*, where the 'hero' is forever on the point of succumbing to mysterious forces that he senses in the forests and lakes around him. In Herzog's case, the point is the balance itself; it might alternatively be characterised as the ability to infect 'realism' with expressionism and vice versa, without any overriding commitment to either mode.

Aguirre, Wrath of God (Contemporary) is something of a departure for Herzog. Its relatively lavish budget doubtless reflects the participation of Klaus Kinski (a presence as astonishing as Eddie Constantine's in *Alpha-ville*); Herzog has used it to engage—for the first time—in a specific historical reconstruction, although the action, like the diary on which it purports to be based, is his own invention. His subject is a quest: fresh from his pillage of the Incas, Pizarro leads his conquistadors over the Andes and down into the Amazon basin, to begin their search for El Dorado. He sends an advance party led by Don Pedro de Ursua and Don Lope de Aguirre to reconnoitre a large tributary of the Amazon. The party meets setbacks and Ursua decides to turn back, but Aguirre mutinies, crippling his superior with a gunshot, and leads the expedition on down the river. As hazards multiply, so does Aguirre's ambition; he proclaims himself 'the wrath of

God'. After two months of hunger, exposure and attacks from natives, he is the sole survivor, his raft swarming with monkeys as it drifts on towards the Atlantic; he dreams of marrying his own daughter and founding the purest dynasty ever known to man.

The factors that superficially distinguish *Aguirre* from Herzog's earlier movies in fact serve to throw his consistent qualities into sharper relief. As in *Even Dwarfs Started Small*, the exposition is both functional and extremely concentrated: each scene and each detail is honed down to its salient features. On this level, the film effectively pre-empted analysis by analysing itself as it proceeds, admitting no ambiguity. Yet at the same time, Herzog's flair for charged, explosive imagery has never had freer rein, and the film is rich in oneiric moments of the kind that spark Stroszek's paroxysm in *Signs of Life*. The extraordinarily beautiful opening scene illustrates the ambivalence. In long shot, the image of the conquistadors descending the Andes pass brims with poetic resonances: the men are situated between the peaks and the valleys, between conquered land and unexplored forests, between 'heaven' and 'earth', shrouded in mists. In close-up, the procession picking its way down the narrow path is presented and defined with specific accuracy; all the leading characters are introduced, the social hierarchy is sketched (the slave porters in chains, the women carried in chairs) and the twin poles of the expedition's ideology are signified through the loads it carries (a large Madonna figure, and an even larger cannon). Neither 'reading' of the action contradicts the other; they are rather mutually illuminating.

Later the distinction between the literal and the figurative (or perhaps the factual and the speculative) becomes less palpable; by the final sequence, it has disappeared entirely. In the last shot, Herzog's camera races along the river to Aguirre's raft and circles it twice before fading out. The effect is to circumscribe Aguirre's fantasy, localising it to the tattered, infested remains of his raft, isolating him from the land he dreams of owning; but the circling motion further signifies that the quest has reached its goal, that there can be no further to go. Just as the dwarfs' abortive revolution found its climax at the sight of a helpless camel, so here the quest for a new world and all its riches finds its apotheosis and its cipher in an image of 'magnificent' dementia.

Herzog never falters on his way to this complex but uncompromising conclusion. As ever, he eschews the easy formulations of political or moral dogma, and avoids sentiment and rancour alike. By now it's clear that Herzog is incapable of dishonesties of this kind; like Buñuel or Franju, he will obviously remain true to himself whatever his subject. The clarity and truth of his method, and the value of his tension between rationality and its opposite, are summarised to perfection in a speech by one of the slaves, Runo Rimac ('He who speaks'), dubbed 'Balthasar' by his captors, when he tells Aguirre's uncomprehending daughter that he pities her and her companions, for he knows that there is no way out of 'their' jungle.

TONY RAYNS

Scenes from a Marriage

Most writers and painters keep notebooks and sketchbooks. Memory is an arbitrary and deceiving instrument, so an artist needs to jot down a phrase, a colour, a perception—sometimes, as with Trigorin in *The Seagull*, whole ideas for future stories are recorded in the pocket-book. They wait awhile and are duly transformed into a work of art, or at least a finished artefact. But what can a film-maker do? He can't be sure that even an 8 mm movie

camera is going to work in an unlit bathroom or on a train. He is reduced to using more traditional ways of note-taking—he must scribble or sketch, pen on paper. The still cumbersome and expensive apparatus of filming, however humble, is rarely at his command. The first bright notice of an event or sight can go agonisingly unrecorded. Raw material gets overcooked waiting for the actors, the crew, the light. Films can lose the name of 'Action!'.

Ingmar Bergman is unique among European directors. He has a prodigiously large and varied output behind him, both in the cinema and the theatre. In Sweden he is a cultural institution, and to the world he very nearly is Sweden. The pressures of such privilege on a formidably sensitive artist must amount at times to agony. How to escape the expectations of a world which has accepted him as a genius? Where can he feel both extended and relaxed? Where can he take notes on the raw material of his art?

Innocence and Panic is the title of the first section of *Scenes from a Marriage* (Gala). Two children run out of frame, away from their parents who are seated on a green nineteenth-century sofa while a youngish woman nervously investigates the truth of the marriage. In this first part of the film the audience is given a hectic account of the calm, humour and integrity which mark the ten years of marriage enjoyed by Marianne (Liv Ullmann) and Johan (Erland Josephson). One thing soon becomes apparent: Marianne takes more time about telling the truth. Her hesitations, although never destructive, are sympathetic. Despite the grotesque circumstances of the interview for a popular magazine, some honesty emerges. The camera hardly moves, the editor's scissors seem idle. We never see the children again in this film version of a six-part television series about a high bourgeois couple whom we meet ten years after their wedding.

Innocence and panic are excellent words to describe the artist faced with the task of turning the dense material of experience into what Virginia Woolf called 'the transparent envelope of art'. The blank sheet of paper, or the white screen, on to which something must be projected with spontaneity and care, are a threat. Bergman has never eschewed blankness. Rather he has recognised the void and filled it with images. The opening sequence of *Persona*, with the small boy facing a litter of projections and sounds, suggests both Bergman's compassion and complexity. All those confusions and suf-

'Aguirre, Wrath of God'

ferings are to be reached, but first—where the hell is the little boy's mother?

In one way we can look at the script for the complete television series both as a notebook for Bergman's preoccupations and a naturalistic summary of his work over the last ten years or so. This period encompasses the production of at least four important 'domestic' films: *Persona*, *Shame*, *A Passion and Cries and Whispers*—each, in my view, a masterpiece. From the middle of the 1960s Bergman seemed less obsessed by religious guilt and more concerned about the hypocrisies and passions of sexual and domestic life. It is not, I hope, impertinent to suggest that this change in direction coincided fairly closely with his professional and personal association with Liv Ullmann.

If it were nothing more, *Scenes from a Marriage* would stand as a tribute to this great actress's art, and to Bergman's understanding of it. She has always worked marvellously for him, so that her appearances in such films as *The Emigrants* and *Lost Horizon* seem almost shocking—she was heavy in the first, trifling in the second. The most effective scene in the new film consists of her reading to her husband from a journal about her adolescent sexuality. This is illustrated by photographs of Liv Ullmann herself at various stages of childhood and adolescence, looking by turns placid and defiant, as she (in the part of Marianne) pours out her confession:

'Suddenly I turned round and looked at the old picture of my classmates, when I was ten. I seemed to be aware of something that had been lying in readiness for a long time, but beyond my grasp. To my surprise I have to admit I don't know who I am... in the snug little world which Johan and I have lived so unconsciously, taking everything for granted, there is a cruelty and brutality implied which frightens me more and more when I think back on it. Outward security demands a high price: the acceptance of a continuous destruction of the personality.'

We see in the images of her young face some of the qualities of passion, reticence and charm which she has retained as a grown woman and which we have already witnessed in the preceding sections of the film. There is apparently no limit to her range. Tenderness and respect to the woman who comes to her, as a lawyer, asking advice about getting a divorce; a harrowing degree of shame and grief when she learns that her husband is running away with a girl





'Scenes from a Marriage': Liv Ullmann, Erland Josephson

called Paula; proud and gentle sexuality during her first reunion with him a year later; calculated revenge when they meet again to arrange the divorce, and finally gaiety, panic and exhaustion in the closing section of the film, set ten years after its opening, when both partners are re-married yet still reliant on each other. One feels that under Bergman's direction there is no great dramatic part which Liv Ullmann could not act.

As shown in London, we see a film lasting two hours and forty-eight minutes. Originally the six episodes of *Scenes from a Marriage* lasted fifty minutes each and were shown at intervals on television. We therefore lose half the playing time, and what is left we see in circumstances quite unlike those for which it was originally designed. The film is shot largely in close-up on 16 mm stock. Gigantic, smutty faces loom from the cinema screen uninterruptedly. Yet it is understood that Bergman is responsible for this cut and this way of showing the film. A

look at the script indicates what we miss—and what we shall see when the BBC show the episodes on television. On the whole what we lose is the family. What seems in the film a deliberate artistic device of showing the children only in the first scene, and then fleetingly, turns out to be an exigency of the cut. Equally, there are long scenes missing between Marianne and her mother. In the film we get claustrophobically closer to Marianne and Johan, to the exclusion of all other characters, as the story progresses; but not in the original. On the whole the excisions have been made gracefully and efficiently, but it is interesting to speculate on exactly how and why they were made. One had pictured Bergman as intransigent in such matters.

Bergman has supplied a brief, portentous and largely unhelpful preface to the 'Six Dialogues for Television' with this final paragraph, which appears below slightly cut:

'What more is there to say? This opus took

three months to write, but rather a long part of my life to experience. I'm not sure whether it would have turned out better had it been the other way round, though it would have seemed nicer. I have felt a kind of affection for these people while I've been busy with them... they talk quite a lot of rubbish, now and then saying something sensible. They are nervous, happy, selfish, stupid, kind, wise, self-sacrificing, affectionate, angry, gentle, sentimental, insufferable and lovable. All jumbled up.'

Well, yes. But who isn't? The raw, unfinished feeling about the film extends further than the script. Not only is the film shot without the customary finish we associate with Bergman and his cameraman Sven Nykvist, but it has virtually no metaphoric overtones. There is a simplicity of vision which in the end seems more to do with crudity and literalness than with purity or directness. Whilst Bergman has succeeded in reaching a large popular audience, in his home country at least, he has lost touch with the true refinements of his art. *Scenes from a Marriage* is less updated Strindberg than high class soap-opera. But more than that it is a gigantic, hacked-about first draft; an over-stuffed notebook bulging with raw material.

JULIAN JEBB

Akenfield

In a brief introduction to his book, Ronald Blythe modestly presented *Akenfield* as a 'statement about living in an East Anglian village at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century.' From its assemblage of simple, first-person prose describing simple and dauntingly repetitive lives, it was in fact to prove a statement of great complexity and poetic density. The villagers' matter-of-fact accounts of hard work and almost constant hardship ('Nobody used pity then, and especially not to children') cumulatively suggested the workings of more abstract processes: historical, economic and elemental.

Although Blythe's subjects included both a forward-looking political organiser and an NUAW secretary, his tape-recordings were predominantly reminiscent—a reflection not so much of the high average age of the village's remaining inhabitants (the younger lads tended merely to comment rather bleakly on their lack of prospects) as of the fact that the comparative was the only mode for making their present circumstances seem comfortable. The older inhabitants functioned as a kind of folk memory, lending a cautionary perspective to the surface improvements of the Sixties. The gadgetry of mechanised farming, liberating workers from literally back-breaking labour, was also liberating many youths from any possibility of staying in the area.

Blythe, who defines himself as a poet, used the methods of a social surveyor to produce in his book an unsentimental dirge for a dwindling community. In adapting his material for the screen, large and small, he has devised a dramatic structure which focuses on one young man's moment of decision without detracting from the bleak range of his original subject. The film of *Akenfield* (London Weekend and VPS) has a human protagonist, but its central character remains the land, its subject the effects of time on it and those who toil upon it.

The screen *Akenfield* follows a young farm labourer, Tom Rouse, through the day of his grandfather's funeral as he tries to decide whether to settle down with his local fiancée in that same grandfather's tied cottage, or to emigrate to Australia and the chance of some land of his own. Reminders of death are literally present as Tom's day takes him from graveyard to funeral to wake; yet it is less these present-tense reminders that establish an elegiac mood than the fact that Blythe's

D. W. Griffith's 'The Struggle': Hal Skelly, Zita Johann



structure and Peter Hall's direction combine to offer us a disconcertingly realistic ghost story.

The ghosts are sometimes heard as voices, sometimes seen in flashbacks evoked by the voices, sometimes alive and well and living on memories. Tom himself is a taciturn fellow—as is shown in his reluctant exchanges with employer, girl friend, mother. Yet his grandfather is never far from his thoughts, and a glimpse of the open grave or a framed photograph on the sideboard is enough to set the old man's voice off on one of his colourful anecdotes or sound pieces of advice. At first this device seems disjunctive: there is no immediate connection between the young man we see eating sliced bread in an austere plastic kitchen and the old one whom we hear describing scenes of appalling carnage in the Dardanelles. If the connection imposes itself with increasing force, this is less the result of the comparatively clumsy device which has Old Tom appear in the person of the same non-actor (Garrow Shand) as his grandson, than because the more we see of young Tom's narrow choices and urge for a wider freedom, the more we realise the extent to which—even while running away—he is following in the muffled family footsteps.

Plunged in the past, the geriatric gossips attending Old Tom's funeral tea tell repeatedly of the time he walked the forty miles to Newmarket to look for a job, only to be obliged to walk the forty miles back. The parallel is underlined at the end: as young Tom cadges a lift to the station, through the car windows he sees Old Tom trudging past on his way back from Newmarket.

These visual links between past and present are occasionally forged with an excessive stylistic flourish (Old Tom's words about the trenches cut with images of a muddy Suffolk field being tilled). But once conjured up, the scenes within each generation—Old Tom crossing a field of truant flint-pickers as he runs away from school to seek work on a farm, his daughter-in-law's brief air-raid courtship—take on a convincing life. It is from the infinite repetition of anecdotes, nostalgic phrases and material preoccupations that the real continuity emerges. And from the flat, recalcitrant land out of which the villagers eke their living. The rewards it offers and the price it extorts are evident in every shot (Ivan Strasberg's Technicolor photography creates an austere pastoral), and have no need of Hall's moments of stylistic overkill: the camera pulling back to reveal a Brueghel-like tableau, with Michael Tippett's music rising on the soundtrack.

Paradoxically, these few intrusive punctuation marks are proof of Hall's remarkable success in directing his non-professional cast. Their 'controlled improvisations', in fact shaped by much astute editing, appear strong enough to carry the film's dramatic and documentary weight. The villagers work so naturally as an ensemble that they prove collectively more interesting than any one of their number. Their incantation of familiar incidents provides a hypnotic musical accompaniment to Tom's drama and also illustrates his dilemma, revealing both the comfort of familiarity and the ever-narrowing circle in which it moves.

JAN DAWSON

The Struggle

For many people the main struggle connected with Griffith's last film has been the simple one of getting to see it. When it was released in 1931, American exhibitors, critics and audiences responded to the Prohibition melodrama with derision, and England was equally hostile ('Dull from start to finish,' pronounced the *Bioscope*);



'Akenfield': Ronald Blythe, who plays the vicar, on left

afterwards the movie sank without trace. Recent retrospectives have endeavoured to bring *The Struggle* back before the public; in 1972 it was due to appear in an NFT season, but the power cuts struck—blacking out the cinema as the credits rolled. Raymond Rohauer and the Gate Cinema recently made another attempt, only to have screenings at bizarre times, fit for non-workers and insomniacs. Those who went, however, were richly rewarded. Critics past and present have cited *The Struggle* as both the crowning glory of the director's career and the worst example of his artistic decline. The truth lies somewhere in between: like Chaplin's *Limelight* and *A King in New York* or Capra's *Pocketful of Miracles*, *The Struggle* is a stranded hulk of a movie, made by an enormous talent at odds with current fashions, tackling antiquated material with a lifetime's technical and emotional knowledge. As such it's clumsy, moving and utterly individual.

At this point in his career, Griffith's head was filled with gigantic impractical dreams: 'If I had my way,' he wrote in 1929, complaining of the film industry's lack of vision, 'I would do Homer's *Iliad*, Antony and Cleopatra, *The Life of Napoleon*, *Medea*.' But in *The Struggle*, a project he initiated himself, he abandoned all such hopes and built a movie without any multi-layered narratives, any allegorical framework or detailed historical reconstruction. Instead he returned to the simple stories of his Biograph one-reelers, when the demon drink frequently caused an avalanche of downfalls—as in *What Drink Did* and similar melodramas (a period of history briefly recreated in the movie's opening scenes, when Mary Pickford—contrary to fact—comes to prominence as 'The Biograph Girl').

Griffith's plot concerns Jimmie Wilson, a steel foundry foreman who never touched a drop before the Volstead Act; once alcohol is taboo, he falls in with the fashion and goes on hectic binges. His wife-to-be enforces an extra marriage vow—abstinence. For a time he has the habit licked but eventually backslides, cashing in a hard-earned insurance policy in the hope of making a fortune with bootlegging racketeers. The fortune never materialises and his life falls to pieces: his apartment is sold, he is estranged from his wife and young daughter, and ends up on the streets shuffling along from one attack of DT's to another. The climax comes when, unwittingly, he almost kills his

own child in one of his drunken tantrums; the wife comes running to the rescue (providing much opportunity for cross-cutting). In the final scene the hero stands with bright eyes and a steady hand, back on the road to success and sanity after a stay in hospital.

The script was elaborated (unwillingly) by Griffith's title-writer on *Intolerance*, Anita Loos, with her husband John Emerson doing his customary job (so Miss Loos recalls) of supplying the punctuation. But the author of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* felt little sympathy for the master's maudlin streak and suggested that the whole thing be played for laughs: the dialogue, consequently, bristles with Jazz Age slang ('Like it? I should kiss a potato!'; 'Get hot, you bozos!') but Griffith resisted her notion of having Jimmy Durante in the leading role. Instead he chose Hal Skelly, a Broadway actor who had risen to prominence in the play *Burlesque* and came to movies with the screen adaptation (he died in 1934 after a car crash). Despite occasional moments of awkwardness, Skelly's performance is a chilling tour-de-force; compared to his physical and mental degeneration, the troubles of other movie boozers seem not worth an aspirin. Griffith charts his decline with infinite compassion and with little recourse to cheap theatricals.

Denied the resources of Long Island's Astoria studios, he was forced to shoot on location in New York (again a reminder of Biograph days)—and the whiffs of fresh air help enormously in fostering believability. Griffith's directorial grip rarely falters: the emotional values of reaction shots and close-ups are perfectly judged (notably when a stupefied Skelly overhears 'Abide With Me' on the radio and remains frozen in self-discovery) and only in the story's final stages does the telling seem at all preposterous (Skelly, now a wide-eyed ragged monster, tottering upstairs and downstairs, threatening his child during a rousing thunderstorm). Zita Johann, as the wife, is less effective, and the supporting roles are mainly caricatures—Cohen, the vaudeville Jewish businessman; the floozie and sharpster who arrange the bootlegging deal. Yet for the most part the movie triumphantly keeps its clichés at bay: blatant melodrama is mixed with harsh emotional truths (an unpalatable combination for audiences in the early 1930s), and the results—while never completely successful—are unforgettable.

GEOFF BROWN

BOOK REVIEWS

TALKING PICTURES

By Richard Corliss

OVERLOOK PRESS, NEW YORK, \$15.00

In the tone of an exiled monarch charitably bestowing his blessing on a sympathetic usurper, Andrew Sarris ushers in *Talking Pictures* with a preface that refers to its 'revisionist enterprise' of promoting the screenwriter over the director in the hierarchy of the Hollywood workshop. But Richard Corliss' 'revisionist' assault on the auteur theory seems inevitably to result in a reign of *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*; Corliss repeatedly, and justifiably, denounces the mystique that has attended the deification of the director, but either surreptitiously or unconsciously has retained a lot of the phraseology as part of his robes of office. The new monarch, in fact, looks less like a usurper than a natural heir who has simply made a great show of bustling into the throne room.

Corliss opens his attack on the rigidity and monotheism of the auteur theory, and qualifies his own championing of the screenwriter's cause, with a call—actually very similar to the disclaimer in Sarris' *American Cinema*—for a criticism which would accommodate a complex grid of theories doing justice to all the creative participants in the collaborative art of movie-making. Rather disingenuously, however, he carries the notion no further than Sarris did a decade ago, and when he invokes the 'collaborative vision' it tends to sound as much of an incantation as the wildest musings of the auteurs: 'The final process—turning the actions of Buchman's script [for *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*] into a sublimely sustained piece of acting—is a mystery that can be appreciated but not explained, since it resides somewhere in the rainbow arc between James Stewart's ineffable performance and its profound incarnation on the porous wall of the movie screen.' (Something more substantial is said about the nature of collaboration in *The Hollywood Screenwriters*, a collection of essays and interviews edited by Corliss.)

Another, most reasonable, quarrel he picks with the cultists of 'Omnipotent Directorism' is over their slighting of the scenarist by assuming that the best Hollywood directors always 'transcend' the material—i.e. the script—with which they work. Unfortunately, the concept of transcendence seems to be essential, on more

than one level, to Corliss' own response to movies. Thus he feels cheated by the mundane resolution of the romantic triangle in *Angel* because 'it's perverse of Lubitsch to have suggested any hope of redemption in the first place'; while he actually seems to accuse Hawks of failing to transcend *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, of revealing instead 'a dogged fidelity to the material, that ultimately makes the film unfaithful to the sympathies of its audience' and leaving the exertion of any magic to the star: 'she [Marilyn Monroe] transcends Lederer's lacklustre script and Hawks' flippant attitude towards the characters...'

Talking Pictures is on firmest ground, and Corliss is at his analytical best, when dealing with the writers who also happen to be directors. His section on Preston Sturges is excellent, including a graceful note or two on the purely visual aspects of Sturges' style; while the chapter on Ben Hecht makes useful links between that pungent aphorist and Howard Hawks (Corliss never really tries to undermine the standing of Pantheon favourites among non-writer directors, though Hawks is perhaps the one most sniped at through the book).

Later chapters seem to fall away as Corliss struggles to identify the personalities of writer-auteurs grouped under 'Themes in Search of a Style' or 'The Chameleons'. The final chapter, bringing the Writers' Guild up to date with a 'New Wind from the East', runs aground on Corliss' positive dislike for Terry Southern, Buck Henry and Erich Segal and on his none too convincing attempt to auteur-ise Jules Feiffer at the expense of Mike Nichols (the simple, cartoon-like design and lack of detail in *Carnal Knowledge* is a 'sensible, radical, formal decision,' whereas the same style in *The Graduate* is 'a right not accorded the film-maker. We expect to see a little life seep in around the edges...'). The book ends on an upswing with a section on Robert Benton and David Newman, who evidently return Corliss to his own personal enthusiasms—their as yet unfilmed script *Hubba-Hubba* is described as 'a temperamental juggling act that brings us back, past 1941, and into the sticks-and-stones age of Ben Hecht and His Merry Misanthropes.'

The author's own predilections, in fact, seem to deprive his theory of any real breadth. 'My own bias,'

he states, in relation to a disgruntled treatment of Fifties' comedy in general and a dismissal of Frank Tashlin in particular, 'is toward comedies that emphasise surprise, and away from those which emphasise pain.' Hence, no chapter on Blake Edwards nor, perhaps for related reasons, one on Samuel Fuller. The most admired non-writer director in the book is undoubtedly Lubitsch (his genius was for 'coaxing humanity out of the stiffest starched collar'), and second place probably goes to his affable opposite number as *metteur en scène*, Mitchell Leisen. True to these enthusiasms, Corliss' own style runs to an epigrammatic elegance, occasionally straining over puns ('abscessed truth', 'emotions that should be acutely felt are too cutely felt-tipped'). It is, as a result, not altogether to the book's credit that the writer-auteur it most successfully champions, themes and all, is, simply, the author.

RICHARD COMBS

THEORY OF FILM PRACTICE

By Noël Burch

Translated by Helen R. Lane

SECKER AND WARBURG, £3.50
(paperback £1.90)

'Theory of Film Practice is at every point derived from and confirmed by the perception that film develops not through the constraints and conventions of an industry, but in opposition to them.' Thus Annette Michelson, in her exemplary introduction to this revised and updated English edition of *Praxis du cinéma* (1969), sets forth one salient fact about Noël Burch's seminal work that clearly isolates it from the critical mainstream as we know it today.

There are many others: a total rejection of the illusionist principle which was expanded in depth by André Bazin (more precisely, extended into deep focus), and has subsequently been adopted as an unexamined postulate by most of his epigones; a 'scientific' approach that rigorously eschews journalism, sociology, literary analysis and the promulgation of moral concerns, however much it reflects Burch's own aesthetic predilections; above all, an obstinate insistence on regarding films as sounds, images and the formal relationships between them.

A redefinition of the components of film form is the task that Burch has set himself: an endeavour vastly more ambitious and far-reaching than anything of its kind to be attempted since the death of Eisenstein. Like Eisenstein, Burch treats film viewing and film-making as parts of the same integral process; and bypassing over two decades of anti-Eisenstein rhetoric—all of it fundamentally illusionist—he re-establishes the shot transition as the cornerstone of formal articulation in cinema.

The first three chapters take us directly into the heart of this

matter. Continuous and discontinuous forms of cutting—called respectively 'matches' and 'mis-matches'—and the various uses of off-screen space are defined and investigated at length. Parameters explored in the remaining seven chapters include softness and sharpness of focus, lighting contrasts, moving and stationary images, long and short sequences, structural uses of sound, functions of chance (a fascinating chapter), and an interesting category designated as 'structures of aggression', in which Burch delineates a tradition stretching from *Un Chien Andalou* and *Le Sang des Bêtes* to Marcel Hanoun and Bergman, by way of Keaton, Langdon, Tex Avery and various Japanese directors. This list of topics is by no means exhaustive; it is worth noting, however, that neither is Burch's. An inquiry into parameters of acting—a central factor in the recent films of Rivette—is noticeably lacking, and undoubtedly there are other lacunae as well.

Yet the material to be found in this deceptively short book is rich and penetrating indeed, and in nearly every case the procedure singled out is far from the obvious textbook exhibit (e.g., the stone lions in *Potemkin*, the cockatoo in *Citizen Kane*). Each example is a genuine discovery: the crucial function of off-screen space in Renoir's *Nana*, chiefly made evident by the actors' entrances into and exits from the frame; permutations of the positions occupied by the actors from one shot to the next in the first half of Kurosawa's *High and Low*; the subtle and dramatic integrations of sound effects with music in Mizoguchi's *The Crucified Lovers*; the remarkable 'structure of variations' in the opening and closing of doors in the dressing-room complex of *The Blue Angel*, controlling what is audible or inaudible from the music hall; the deliberate rhythmic alternation between 'strong', active and eventful moments and 'weak', empty and boring ones in *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*, with each sequence composed as an independent 'cellular unit'; the progression of Lang's *M* from 'temporally and spatially autonomous' shots to 'an increasing use of the continuity cut, finally culminating in the famous trial sequence in which temporal and spatial continuity are strictly preserved for some ten minutes.' Each of these examples suggests not only an underlying pattern which is relevant to the film at every level (thematic, dramatic and psychological as well as 'technical'), but a central insight into how the film as a whole works.

Offering lessons in how to look and listen, Burch is practically without peer in making legible the procedures that ordinarily escape the layman's attention—especially in those illusionist contexts where an audience's absorption in actors and plots banishes the means by which they are being articulated to the realm of invisibility, distract-

tion, or mere window dressing. For this reason alone, it is hardly surprising that Burch's book has been summarily dismissed or ignored by 'mainstream' critics and filmgoers since its appearance in English over a year and a half ago. Fundamentally at odds with the bulk of what appears in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, *Positif*, *Film Comment* and comparable publications, it implicitly threatens the ground that most cinéphiles walk upon. Using examples from figures as diverse as Hitchcock, Antonioni, Fuller, Bresson, Welles and Ozu, Burch proceeds under the firm (if perennially unpopular) notion that 'a complete reading of artistic process, including the conscious perception of form, is a liberating activity.'

As Burch suggests in his preface to this edition, a lot of alterations and refinements have taken place in his theoretical work since these essays were written in 1967. An idiosyncratic study of Marcel L'Herbier (Seghers, 1973), important contributions to *After-image* #4 and #5, a brilliant analysis of Lang's German films in *Cinéma: Théorie, Lectures* (Klincksieck, 1973) and two forthcoming books—'a study of the concept of form in Japanese cinema' and 'a history of the development of Western film language from 1895 to 1935'—all give some indication of the changes in emphasis and direction. But however outdated much of the book appears to Burch today, as evidenced by the countless self-critical footnotes peppering this edition, it unquestionably remains a book years ahead of its time, particularly in an Anglo-American context. And for anyone interested in following Burch's development—which has since expanded to incorporate semiological and Marxist methodologies—it is an ideal and obvious starting point.

One must protest, however, the shabby treatment this English text has been given by its publishers. Quite apart from the use of a production still from Lang's *You Only Live Once* on the cover of the English edition—odd indeed considering Burch's well-advertised disdain for Lang's American films, and scarcely relevant to anything inside the book—the copy-editing of the text frequently borders on the risible. To misappropriate a few of Burch's terms, the Introduction momentarily creates 'two kinds of space' by referring to an analysis of a film (*Baby Face Nelson*) that isn't even cited in the text, the footnotes to the final chapter are a series of 'mismatches' (after an earlier footnote introduces us to one Millar Gavin), while the demented index—which offers us *True Confessions* and a mysterious chap named Edmond Genet, but omits dozens of important references to films and film-makers, including every mention of Tati and Dreyer—can only be regarded as a 'structure of aggression'.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

MY LIFE IN PICTURES

By Charles Chaplin

Introduction by Francis Wyndham

BODLEY HEAD, £6.95

Charles Chaplin is the most famous Englishman alive, and his autobiography in photographs would be a fascinating and useful document. Despite its title, however, this lavish volume is not that document: of its over six hundred illustrations, less than a third are offscreen pictures of Chaplin, or of people and incidents in his life. Nor is this the other book which the ambiguous title might imply, a history of Chaplin's work through stills: it illustrates many of his films, but by no means all.

My Life in Pictures is neither all biography nor film history, but a mixture of both, a piece of Sunday supplement journalism writ large. In many ways, this is a compliment. With *Picture Post* and *Life* dead, the traditions of photo-journalism are kept alive by the supplements and sometimes—as in their use of colour and their coverage of the arts—they improve on their originals. But they have their defects, and one is an infuriating belief that normally proportioned black and white pictures are boring and old-fashioned. So the photographs in this book get printed in red, yellow, brown or sepia but rarely in their original colours. They are cropped, cut into circles, printed sideways, overlapped, spread across pages like packs of cards thrown on to a table. Most revealing of the method, and the thinking behind it, is a two-page spread which at first glance appears to be a twelve-still sequence from *Modern Times*. It is not. It is one image, repeated six times the right way round, and six times reversed.

Many of the illustrations have first-person captions in Chaplin's own words, but these are mostly rehashes of bits of *My Autobiography* (the Penguin edition, at 65 pence, has 113 photographs, of which about a quarter reappear here). The changes are slight, and give the impression of sub-editors at work. For instance, the autobiography's 'I had completed only a three-reel comedy, *Sunny-side*, and that had been like pulling teeth. Without question, marriage was having an effect on my creative faculties' becomes 'This three-reel pastoral comedy took a long time to make; it was a bit like pulling teeth. Without question, marriage to Mildred seemed to be having a very bad effect on my creative faculties.'

Though there is no index, there is a filmography, largely accurate but with far less information than, say, that by Theodore Huff. It lists fifteen films from Chaplin's Essanay period, though the text elsewhere says: 'I made sixteen movies for Essanay.' The correct number is (I think) fourteen, plus three assemblies of footage edited and released by the company some time after Chaplin had left. The filmography gives one of these, *Triple Trouble*, and says

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'Adapted by Essanay from a film that Chaplin had left unfinished called *Life*.' *Life* is not mentioned in any other book that I know (including Chaplin's autobiography). Is it a new revelation? Or a mistake? A photograph later in the book is captioned: '*Work* (June 1915) was also known as *The Paper Hanger*, and the scene (left) was later included in *Triple Trouble* (1918).' That is certainly the usual version.

If such examples demonstrate that this is not a particularly revealing or academic book, only a churl would deny that it is attractive and entertaining. Its proper place may not be on the library shelf, but it will surely grace many a coffee table.

COLIN FORD

TAKE ONE

By Mervyn LeRoy, as told to Dick Kleiner.

W. H. ALLEN, £3.50

I REMEMBER IT WELL

By Vincente Minnelli, with Hector Arce.

DOUBLEDAY, NEW YORK, \$10.95

CECIL B. DeMILLE

By Charles Higham.

W. H. ALLEN, £4.00

Autobiographies from Hollywood veterans continue to proliferate, celebrating an industry and a way of life which long since went with the wind. Most of them disappoint, for they strive to mix an adventure story with a critical study, a technical manual with a press release—a task which would defeat the most accomplished writer. Mervyn LeRoy's autobiography provides a clear example of the genre's pitfalls. For an avowed believer in films which tell 'a comprehensible story with warmth and feeling,' LeRoy tells his own story abominably—but then few directors' lives are as well structured as a Hollywood script. Once his cinema career started, his adventures stopped: happily ensconced at Warner Brothers or MGM, he simply turned out one impeccably commercial movie after another (none of them, he says proudly, ever lost money). One yearns for some critical perceptions to offset this lack of drama; but they never come, and the book disintegrates into a fabric of random recollections, from his favourite practical jokes to a meeting with the Pope during *Quo Vadis*, orthodox opinions and a few practical tips.

Minnelli's autobiography, predictably, has more substance: if LeRoy epitomises the intuitive director who stands or falls by his 'common touch', by sensing and meeting moviegoers' demands, Minnelli is the ever-conscious artist, who follows his own obsessions and commits his own follies. Consequently he is more self-aware than LeRoy; with Judy and Liza prominent in his life, he is also more saleable. The opening bodes ill, with ruminations on his

own natural reticence followed by a foolish conversation between father, daughter and nameless interviewer.

Once his throat is cleared, however, Minnelli's narrative amply holds its own, taking us from his first stage appearance in *East Lynne* (at the age of three-and-a-half), through his work in the New York musical theatre (much useful detail here), on to Hollywood, *Cabin in the Sky*—and Judy. But when the book's most charismatic character departs in the early 1950s, its impetus lessens, and the director's life seems much like LeRoy's; a random succession of famous movies and famous people. Minnelli's insights into his career and talents are valuable, but clouded by his modesty: rather than blow his own trumpet, he prefers to quote contemporary reviewers (mostly Bosley Crowther). The opinions of his cult followers, however, leave him plainly bemused. 'I always find it a hoot,' he writes, 'when film buffs turn directors' names into adjectives.' From his own account, the Minnellian vision seems merely comprised of favourite colours, favourite camera movements and a general penchant for fantasy.

Film biographies present different problems, as Charles Higham's volume on DeMille makes clear. If hefty research is involved, the writer may become so enamoured of his precious material that he loses the sense of its worth; he may also brighten it up too much with journalistic tricks to make his subject a living reality—all of which can blur the book's focus. Higham quotes endlessly from DeMille's telegrams, and constantly 'sets the scene' with titbits about the epic productions' inventories, the interior decoration of DeMille's office, his foot fetishism (explainable by his weak ankles?), and his tastes at breakfast (stale rye bread). But the 'scene' never takes place: Higham offers little sustained analysis of any DeMille movie, and his stated thesis—that DeMille declined from a great director to a great entertainer—is allowed to lie fallow.

GEOFF BROWN

SIX EUROPEAN DIRECTORS

By Peter Harcourt

PENGUIN BOOKS, 60p

Deservedly a popular lecturer on film studies both in Britain and Canada, Peter Harcourt sums up ten years of screenings, writings and discussions in what the title page describes as 'essays on the meaning of film style.' His six chosen directors are true campus favourites: Eisenstein, Renoir, Buñuel, Bergman, Fellini and Godard, inescapable names in any serious academic approach to the cinema. Given the film lecturer's advantage that he is in a position to screen what he likes as often as he likes, year after year, to endlessly fresh generations of students, Harcourt's essays can be expected

to reflect both an easy familiarity with all the important films in cinema history and a confident critical vantage point from which they can be examined in detail.

The arrogance of the specialist, however, is clearly foreign to Harcourt's nature. The tone he admires in criticism, he says, 'is that of an inquiring tentativeness, reflecting the difficulties of knowing with certainty anything at all in a world in which the traditional values have either gone soft and hypocritical or else have actually dwindled away.' His opinions are accordingly expressed with caution, and his copious footnotes urge us to investigate the alternatives—he is scrupulous in giving credit not only for quotations but also for ideas and phrases. The cinema offers 'experiences that need to be puzzled out,' but he is hesitant about doing the puzzling for us.

It's a technique that works wonders in the classroom, serving to draw the fire of students and to help them work out their own critical strategies; to observe Harcourt in discussion is to realise that teaching too can be an art form. But on the page, for all that his writing flows with elegance and eloquence, the method leaves the writer with a tone of curious expectancy, asking a whole flight of useful questions but implying that to search for answers would be a futile exercise. Surely, one thinks, he must have reached a few unshakeable conclusions, a Harcourt creed against which we can measure our own responses? But no, he is resolute in his self-denial, and with a wholly likeable honesty admits that 'I still cannot describe accurately how these scenes affect me' when confronted by, for example, the antiseptic erotica of *Une Femme Mariée*. 'What is our relation to all this?' he asks of *Los Olvidados*. 'What are the qualities in life that might help us endure?' Still not an easy question to answer.

Not surprisingly, Harcourt's six directors all turn out to resemble each other in their enigmatic qualities. Eisenstein (stretching a point, surely, to call him European?) specialises in 'processions and ceremonies... which in detail we cannot understand' and more than any other film-maker 'resists any attempt at summing up.' Renoir's films are seen as contemporary in spirit because of their 'uncertain moral position.' They 'work by indirection, implying qualities and attitudes that are rarely stated directly.' Anything said about Buñuel 'must be both tentative and provisional,' while with Bergman 'I found it difficult to be certain where (he) stood in relation to his material.' Then there's the 'wilfully irrational' Fellini, with his 'uncertain control' and the 'something deep within him that exists beyond thought,' and of course Godard with his 'texture of uncertainty' and his 'questioning, this restlessly uncertain quality of every word and every image, that makes his films seem so much of our times.'

Maintaining allegiance to an intuitive enjoyment of the cinema, Harcourt is at his best when delving into a film like *A Passion*, which doesn't really work unless one sets aside rational expectations, although his admiration in this instance leads to some surprising claims ('the problems raised in the film are answered by the film as well'). He provides good backgrounds to Bergman and Buñuel, hotly defends the indefensible in *Satyricon*, and has plainly spent many unhappy hours with Eisenstein and Godard. He's at his most valuable with Renoir, from whom he draws the moral, appropriately enough, that 'to take a stand is to isolate yourself from society and happiness.'

Where Renoir has compensations to offer, however, Harcourt's avoidance of isolation is ultimately unsatisfying; his 'essays on the meaning of film style' give only a vague impression of style (one of the most troublesome and unexplained words in film criticism) and find that meanings are unreliable. Rather, the book supports with deceptive ease Harcourt's preliminary apology for the cinema as an art form that is popular because it reflects 'a world where cogent and purposive thought has become so difficult.' It is encouraging to find him looking to the future with such excitement. Let's hope things get a bit easier there, one way or the other.

PHILIP STRICK

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

GEOFF BROWN did post-graduate research on the Marx Brothers at the Royal College of Art and contributes to *Monthly Film Bulletin*, *Time Out* and *City Press*. A book on American literary humour is in preparation... MANNY FARBER is a painter, art critic, and one of the most individual of American writers on films... COLIN FORD is Keeper of Film and Photography at the National Portrait Gallery and was until 1972 Deputy Curator of the National Film Archive. Author (with Roy Strong) of *An Early Victorian Album*... DAVID MCGILLIVRAY is a freelance writer on films and scriptwriter (*Frightmare*)... HERBERT MARSHALL has been a producer, director and writer for films, theatre and TV and is a prolific writer. Is at present Professor at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale... ANDREW MEYER is a film writer and director, and has written on films for a number of New York magazines... JAMES MONACO is currently completing a book on the New Wave to be called *Method and Sentiment*... PHILIP PURSER is television critic of the *Sunday Telegraph*... PAUL THOMAS lectures at the University of Liverpool. He tried to make ends meet as a graduate student and Teaching Fellow at Harvard by giving courses on the films of Jean Renoir and on postwar Italian cinema.

Letters

Hong Kong Movies

SIR,—Knowledgeable readers living in Hong Kong must be having a quiet chuckle over Tony Rayns' article on Hong Kong action movies, 'Threads Through the Labyrinth' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1974). It is not clear how many Hong Kong movies Mr. Rayns has seen (about two dozen or so have been released in the U.K.), but at best these are only a chip off the iceberg. It is also not clear how much actual research (as opposed to groundless, 'semiological' speculation) he has done. His main factual errors are:

1. Information about Hong Kong movies abounds in Hong Kong—in Chinese. There are obstacles, but no barriers.

2. The 1966 'target' of breaking into the American market is a sheer publicity story. Success in that market came out of the blue. When I met him last year, Mr. Run Run Shaw saw it as a short-run development and that he would soon have to return to his basic Asian audience.

3. The Hong Kong movie industry, so far from being prosperous for 30 years, has hovered many times on the edge of collapse. A large number of companies, including the very big ones Yung Hwa and Cathay, have in fact gone under.

His main interpretative errors are:

4. Often enough gangs as well as single heroes play central roles—it's just that in the movies released abroad this is not apparent.

5. Heroines are also, in other movies, as autonomous as heroes.

6. The Taoist and Shaolin philosophies are only a couple of the innumerable marshal arts ideas which exist in China.

7. *Beach of the War Gods* is slick, but a copy of innumerable Japanese sword-fight movies.

8. The ritualised fight scenes grew from the fantastic sword-fight sequences in Cantonese movies—which date back as far as the late Thirties—and also from Japanese sword-fight movies which have their origin in Ken-geki (Sword Theatre).

9. Taking Chang Cheh's *Golden Swallow* as a cipher for Hong Kong action movies is like taking the American TV show *Kung Fu* as a guide to Asian philosophy. Chang is a fast-working, Shaw Brothers hack, whose *Golden Swallow* was a commercial job rushed out to re-use and exploit the characters originally developed in King Hu's hit *Come Drink with Me*. Hu is the most inventive action director in Hong Kong, works

very slowly, is still active, but none of his movies has reached Europe even though many of them were big successes in Asia. It is the conventions and style of Hu's earlier film that holds Chang's film together. This also explains why Chang's other films are 'routine'.

10. To generalise: The main fault of the article is the author's failure to appreciate that Hong Kong action movies have not sprung from nowhere. They continue a tradition in the Hong Kong Chinese movie which goes back into earlier eras of sword-fight and fantasy and can be traced easily to the Thirties. The other Asian root is undoubtedly Japan. The one-armed swordsman movies, for example, are a straight copy of a brilliant series of popular movies based on a Robin Hood type character called Zatoichi which have been an immense success in Japan in the last ten years. Zatoichi is a blind swordsman with incredibly developed hearing and reflexes who can take on entire circles of 25 swordsmen and defeat them all!

The point is that the Hong Kong movie industry is an interesting and phenomenal one, but unremittably commercial. It operates almost entirely in terms of formulas, and once a formula is proved at the box-office, it is exploited to death, not only by the big studios but by the innumerable small fly-by-night companies. Recently, a local television programme gave birth to a Shaw Brothers movie (rather as in Britain with *On the Buses*), which was shot in Cantonese for the Hong Kong audience (Chu Yuen's *72 Tenants*). This was a sensational success and was immediately copied by the same studio and by all its competitors. As a result there was a very quick bubble for this kind of movie, which equally quickly burst. None of these movies has been or will be seen in the West.

It is a great pity that the first major article on Hong Kong movies carried by SIGHT AND SOUND has been in the usual uninformative, speculative, lit. crit. style instead of being factual and based on solid research. Directors like King Hu, Chu Yuen, Li Han Hsiang and Lung Kong have a considerable body of brilliant work behind them which is known to movie aficionados in Tai-wan, Hong Kong and some overseas Chinese communities. These directors and their work deserve exhibition and discussion in the West on a serious basis.

Yours faithfully,

IAN JARVIE

Professor of Philosophy

York University, Ontario.

TONY RAYNS writes: Readers less full of their own importance than the good Professor will probably have perceived that the aim of my article was neither to undertake a definitive analysis of the martial arts genre nor to offer value judgments on those few examples

of it released in Britain, but rather to sketch out some salient features of a popular genre, new to the West, whose origins are clearly very complex. I thought of it as elementary groundwork for a future study that might follow the lines of, say, Vladimir Propp's work on the morphology of Russian folk-tales. Everything from the title of my article to its concluding sentence was explicitly tentative.

Most of Jarvie's patronising comments on the 'unremittably commercial' nature of the movies ought to have been precluded by my comparison of Hong Kong's film industry with Italy's (where Pasolini can barely get *The Decameron* on screen before 50 cheap imitations are jostling for the status of a sequel); one wonders how Jarvie's quaint aesthetic copes with Hollywood movies of the Thirties or Forties, when formula was equally paramount. It's sad to see what amounts to a radical difference in critical method being used like a blunt instrument; a modicum of engaged critical debate would have served both our purposes better. None the less, a few of Jarvie's 'points' demand rebuttal.

1. I was indebted to Verina Glaessner (author of a recently published book on martial arts movies) for confirmation of the fact that Chinese popular cinema is as ill-documented as any other country's. Unlike me, she was able to undertake first-hand research in Hong Kong, and reported that most production companies were hostile to any attempt to discuss their movies at a more substantial level than that practised by the Chinese fan magazines. The experience is familiar to students of popular culture in all fields.

2. The information that the Chinese set out to conquer Western markets comes from a feature in a 1966 *Variety* (issue of September 14). Both Shaw Brothers and Cathay made concerted efforts to market their films to the West at Cannes in 1972; Shaw Brothers followed up by hiring a cinema in

London's West End as a showcase for four of their movies, a move that led directly to Warner's acquisition of *King Boxer* in Britain. I would not define this as 'success coming out of the blue'. I'd interpret Run Run Shaw's remark to Jarvie as a typically shrewd realisation that the gimmick value of kung fu in foreign markets would wane.

3. I'm sure that Cathay's new London office would be interested to hear that the company has 'gone under'.

4. If Chang Cheh was ever a 'Shaw Brothers hack', then he isn't any longer. As Jarvie should be aware, he formed his own production company over a year ago, and has so far released three excellent independent movies as co-writer/director. I nowhere suggest that his work has ever been merely 'routine'; on the contrary, I consider him one of the most adventurous directors currently active in the popular cinema of any country.

5. The Japanese influence apparent in a movie like *Beach of the War Gods* springs from co-productions like *Zatoichi* and the *One-Armed Swordsman*, which co-stars Wang Yu and Shintaro Katsu. It's not so much that A influences B, but rather that these movies mesh influences from many cultures, including both European and American.

6. It's pointless to observe that Chu Yuan's *House of 72 Tenants* has generated a host of 'sequels' (*Hong Kong 73*, *Gossip Street*, etc.) without further remarking that they constitute a fascinating subgenre of comedies of social criticism, closely reflecting the parlous state of domestic politics.

7. Like my inclusion of a film by Chu Yuan in a SIGHT AND SOUND 'ten best' list for 1973, the article was intended to carry a modest polemic force, asserting the interest of Hong Kong movies as a locus of energies at cinema's 'grass roots' level. Without wishing to support Jarvie's implication that a handful of very talented

Martial arts: Fu Sheng and Chen Kuan Tai in Chang Cheh's 'Heroes Two'





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his other recent work.

Add to that reviews of *Thieves
Like Us*, *Murder on the Orient
Express*, *That's Entertainment*, *Le
Petit Théâtre de Jean Renoir* and 99
and 44/100% Dead! (with concise
profiles of Jean Boffery, Agatha
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directors in some sense eclipse
the industry that produced them, I
note that screenings of *The Valiant
Ones* have just established King
Hu as an auteur in Paris, and that
plans are afoot to give his earlier
Fate of Lee Khan some kind of
run in London.

Brecht and the Film

SIR,—Martin Walsh's thoroughly
absorbing essay on 'Brecht and the
Film' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn
1974) left me with only one
question unsolved. His discussion
revolved around the opposition
between 'illusionary' and 'aliena-
tory' techniques in the cinema.
This struck me as setting up a
false dualism, since many artists
succeed in combining both these
apparently irreconcilable tech-
niques together. The extremely
inverted art of Munch, for
instance, alienates and attracts at
one and the same time through
his use of emotional and cerebral
forms of expression.

If the 'official' critics came to
regard Eisenstein as idiosyncratic
and individualist, it would be
instructive to know how Brecht
regarded the Baudelairean aes-
thetic, in which the audience
reaches a critical understanding
of the work by examining the
reasons for its emotional impact.
The spectator, just as much as the
artist, should be both a poet and
a critic. Or, art should only seduce
the audience in order to make it
aware of the techniques of seduc-
tion.

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT J. BROWN

London, W6.

SIR,—Martin Walsh in his excel-
lent article says Brecht's first ven-
ture into cinema (with the
exception of some screenplays re-
putedly written in the Twenties)
was in 1930. In the two volumes
Texte für Filme by Bertolt
Brecht (Aufbau Verlag, 1971) a
number of screenplays are pub-
lished which were actually written
in the Twenties and which give
a fascinating insight into Brecht's
cinematic ideas. I don't believe
these texts are yet available in
English, unfortunately.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN C. GREEN

London, W5.

Dirty Money

SIR,—May I correct you on an
error in your review of *Dirty
Money* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn
1974) in which you stated that
Alain Delon was the drug dealer
and Richard Crenna the cop. It
was actually Delon the police
commissioner and Crenna the
criminal.

Mind you, perhaps it would
have been a better film with
Delon in his usual type cast role—
the gangster. It is a great pity,
though, that the film never re-
captured its marvellous authentic
and explosive opening sequence.
It was a truly virtuoso bit.

Yours faithfully,
GREGORY HANNA

London, SW19.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-WARNER for *California
Split*, *Badlands*, *The Terminal
Man*.

CIC for *The Day of the Locust*,
Chinatown, *The Parallax View*.

UNITED ARTISTS for *Rollerball*.
photograph of Vittorio De Sica.

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Wrath of God, *Le Petit Théâtre
de Jean Renoir*.

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Mother and the Whore*, *Scenes
from a Marriage*.

EAGLE FILMS for *Heroes Two*.

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WARNER BROS. for *The Big Sleep*,
White Heat, *Manpower*, *High
Sierra*.

20TH CENTURY-FOX for *Under
Pressure*, *Me and My Gal*.

FILMVERLAG DER AUTOREN for *The
Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty*,
photograph of Wim Wenders.

TANGO FILM/FILMVERLAG DER
AUTOREN for *Martha*, *Effi Briest*,
photograph of Rainer Werner
Fassbinder.

KAIROS FILM/FILMVERLAG DER
AUTOREN for *Occasional Work of
a Female Slave*.

TMS FILMPRODUKTION for *Ludwig
II*, *Ludwig's Cook*, photograph of
Hans-Jürgen Syberberg.

GREENWICH FILM PRODUCTION for
Le Fantôme de la Liberté.

TERRA FILM (Paris)/SOAT (Milan)
for *L'Homme sans Visage*.

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God*.

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FILM GUIDE

**AGUIRRE, WRATH OF GOD

(Contemporary)
Werner Herzog takes Klaus Kinski and a band of mutinous conquistadores through the Amazon basin in search of El Dorado. In a sense, they find it: their voyage yields one of the cinema's most luminous visions of the will to power in all its splendid insanity. (Helena Rojo, Ruy Guerra.) Reviewed.

*APPRENTICESHIP OF DUDDY KRAVITZ, THE

(Fox-Rank)
A roughly edited sampling of incident from Mordecai Richler's novel, illustrating how grasping, greedy Duddy aspires to be the new Shylock, and loses the love and respect of those nearest and dearest. Gains a point for the sharpness of some of its ethnic in-joking. (Richard Dreyfuss, Jack Warden; director, Ted Kotcheff.)

*AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MISS JANE PITTMAN, THE

(Saga)
American television film in which the life and hard times of Black America, from the Civil War to civil rights, are reflected through the memories of a 110-year-old woman. More piecemeal than picaresque, but sustained by Cicely Tyson's performance. (Thalmus Rasulala, Michael Murphy; director, John Korty.)

**BADLANDS (Columbia-Warner)

Stunning debut by Terrence Malick, with his script and direction counterpointing perfectly to offer a haunting vision of innocent depravity as his 'last romantic couple'—first cousins to Pierrot and Marianne—absently kill their way to an illusory Eldorado. (Martin Sheen, Sissy Spacek, Warren Oates.) Reviewed.

*BAWDY TALES

(United Artists)
Using a Pasolini script, Sergio Citti extends his mentor's own recent attempts at films 'outside ideology' (where the only point of telling tales is the telling itself) by dispensing with the artist-as-interpreter figure: his discursive narrators finally take their place in a story of their own. Excrucially dubbed in this censored English version. (Franco Citti, Ninetto Davoli.)

BREEZY (CIC)

Clint Eastwood's third film as director has all the disadvantages of the first two (a lugubriousness of style and banality of characterisation) and none of the advantages (some baroque ornamentation). Very plain TV fare, apart from the atrophied lushness of its settings and the sharpness of William Holden's practised portrait of the ageing loner. (Kay Lenz, Marj Dusay.)

**CALIFORNIA SPLIT

(Columbia-Warner)
Robert Altman's latest talk fest takes up the claustrophobic world of compulsive gambling to play a chancy sort of game: a subtle comparison of acting styles (Elliott Gould and George Segal) set within a swarming context of shifting details that keeps the audience as hyper-naturally alert

and active as the fly-by-night characters. (Ann Prentiss, Gwen Welles.) Reviewed.

CINDERELLA LIBERTY

(Fox-Rank)
After being nobly served by Robert Towne's adaptation of his *Last Detail*, novelist Darryl Ponicsan scuttles his own material in this woeful navy lark which jettisons humour in order to squeeze in *Love Story*, a tour of the new Film City, Seattle, and the juvenile pap of director Mark Rydell's *The Cowboys*. (James Caan, Marsha Mason, Eli Wallach.)

CLAUDINE (Fox-Rank)

Embarrassingly heart-warming everyday story of Harlem folk, in which a pretty mother of six falls for a twice-married garbage collector and love triumphs over every plastic problem the script can concoct. The moral, plastered thickly over all, is that under the skin black and white are really just the same. . . . (Diahann Carroll, James Earl Jones; director, John Berry.)

*DIRTY MARY, CRAZY LARRY

(Fox-Rank)
Formulary road film in which a fanatical racing driver and his faithful mechanic (plus a dizzy groupie along for the ride) bulldoze a path to freedom with the proceeds of a robbery intended to finance a career in the big time. Well staged but thoroughly predictable in all departments. (Peter Fonda, Susan George, Adam Roarke; director, John Hough.)

EMMANUELLE (SF)

The shocker that is supposed to relegate *Last Tango in Paris* to the nursery turns out to be a simple sexploiter, rescued from the dirty-mac halls on the strength of its deodorant-ad photography and the aching arch aphorisms of its po-faced sexologist. (Sylvia Kristel, Alain Cuny; director, Just Jaeckin.)

*FANTASTIC PLANET

(Hemdale)
Animated science fiction feature, Swiftian in concept (Brobdingnagians and Lilliputians learning to live together) but whimsical in execution. Some eye-catching design by Roland Topor. (Director, René Laloux.)

**GRAVY TRAIN, THE

(Columbia-Warner)
Excellent script in which Terrence Malick's pseudonymous contribution is signalled by the wit, the gamey dialogue, and the slithering fantasy/reality conflict. Though bludgeoningly directed by Jack Starrett, the script and the performances of Stacy Keach and Frederic Forrest pull this robbery caper right out of the rut. (Margot Kidder.)

HARRY AND TONTO

(Fox-Rank)
Overlong and rather aimless odyssey of a septuagenarian (Art Carney) leaving New York to visit his children and settle his life, with a cat in tow and oddball adventures along the way. (Ellen Burstyn, Arthur Hunnicutt; director, Paul Mazursky.)

*JUGGERNAUT (United Artists)

Old-fashioned, efficient ship-disaster suspense, with Richard Lester gags dropped into the available slots and a fancy piece of showmanship from Richard Harris; the rest is *Grand Hotel* mini-plots. (Shirley Knight, Roy Kinnear.)

KAZABLAN (CIC)

An Israeli attempt to transplant *West Side Story*, crossing its musical exuberance with local colour and local problems; the end product, unfortunately, is simply a plastic bouquet. (Yehoram Gaon, Efrat Lavie; director, Menahem Golan.)

**LONGEST YARD, THE (CIC)

The Dirty Dozen transferred, with more bite and less moral ambivalence, to the context of a prison football team (vengeful convicts vs. sadistic warders). A lovely *Catch 22* situation, with reverberating black humour and brooding violence fully exploited by Aldrich and an excellent cast. (Burt Reynolds, Eddie Albert, Ed Lauter.)

*MIDNIGHT MAN, THE (CIC)

Glossy whodunit with more twists than thrills, about a murder on campus investigated by nightwatchman Burt Lancaster (an ex-cop disgraced for killing his wife's lover). Efficient enough but lifeless, and burdened with portentous sentiments about solitude, violence and the nature of the beast. (Susan Clark, Cameron Mitchell; directors, Roland Kibbee, Burt Lancaster.)

**MOTHER AND THE WHORE, THE (Gala)

219 minutes of aphoristic word-spinning and cathartic confessions around St. Germain des Prés in bleak black-and-white photography may sound like too much of a good thing—a running of New Wave conventions into the ground. But before Jean Eustache's marathon of post-1968 disillusionment is over, one recognises that this is precisely his point. (Jean-Pierre Léaud, Françoise Lebrun, Bernadette Lafont.) Reviewed.

*MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

(EMI)
Murder within the confines of the snowbound Orient Express provides one of the year's stagier divertissements. The logistics of moving so many suspects and so many intertwined motives through so small a space proves taxing for Sidney Lumet, though the bevy of famous faces helps relieve any longueurs of the trip. (Albert Finney, Lauren Bacall, Ingrid Bergman, Anthony Perkins, Richard Widmark.)

**MY AIN FOLK (Contemporary)

Second part of Bill Douglas' autobiographical trilogy about the stunted upbringing of a young Scot. Catches all the sullenness (and some of the sentimentality) of the Lowlands in its harsh, intractable and impressive account of an unforgiven and unforgiving childhood. (Stephen Archibald, Hughie Restorick, Helena Gloag.)

NIGHT PORTER, THE

(Avco-Embassy)
Unholy alliance between *Cabaret* and *Last Tango in Paris* to sire a sort of *Carry On Masochism* when a Nazi torturer and his trembling victim meet fifteen years later for a sexual and ideological *Götterdämmerung*. (Dirk Bogarde, Charlotte Rampling; director, Liliana Cavani.)

99 AND 44/100% DEAD

(Fox-Rank)
Supposedly a comic strip parody of the gangster genre, but the title is all too descriptive of a film which is misconceived and—with the exception of Bradford Dillman's manic gang boss—misperformed. (Richard Harris, Edmond O'Brien, Ann Turkel; director, John Frankenheimer.)

*OTELLO (EMI)

One of the more successful opera films, directed and conducted by Herbert von Karajan from his Salzburg Festival production. Soundtrack variable, but the power of the great work comes over. (Jon Vickers, Mirella Freni, Peter Glossop.)

**PARALLAX VIEW, THE (CIC)

After the disastrous vacation of *Love and Pain*, Alan Pakula returns to the working environment of *Kluge* with a thriller that conjures a paranoid nightmare out of current theories of political conspiracy. The abstractions of the

style perhaps prove a bit too much for the material (and Warren Beatty's moody Method performance) to bear. (Paula Prentiss, Hume Cronyn.) Reviewed.

**PETIT THEATRE DE JEAN RENOIR, LE (Contemporary)

A belated treat, made for TV in 1969 and now fittingly released as part of Renoir's 80th birthday celebrations. Small in scope, but typically expansive and still experimental in mood, this four-part film is like a philosophical conclusion to one of the cinema's greatest careers. (Fernand Sardou, Françoise Arnoul, Marguerite Cassan, Jeanne Moreau.) Reviewed.

*PROJECTIONIST, THE

(Fair Enterprises)
The minor part of Harry Hurwitz's first feature is the life and times of a Manhattan movie projectionist. More interesting are the movie-inspired dreams that clutter his thoughts—a serial in which he stars as Captain Flash, and some funny, inventive montages of Hollywood favourites. (Chuck McCann, Ina Balin.)

**SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE (Gala)

Bergman's reputation as a director of women and Liv Ullmann's lately rather diminished standing as an actress are triumphantly reasserted by this dissection of middle-class marriage, which focuses mainly on the wife's progress from guilt and self-deceit to a kind of compromised happiness. Compulsively watchable, for all the constant TV close-ups. (Erland Josephson, Bibi Andersson.) Reviewed.

**TAKING OF PELHAM 123, THE (United Artists)

Witty, fast-paced crime-and-suspense drama in which four men hijack a New York subway train and hold the passengers to ransom. Joseph Sargent grinds the gears occasionally with his mixture of buffoonery and explicit violence, but the entertaining cynicism ensures a generally smooth ride. (Walter Matthau, Robert Shaw, Martin Balsam.)

**TEMPLE OF THE DRAGON (Eagle)

Chang Cheh quits Shaw Brothers and produces his most innovative film. The account of the suppression of the Shaolin Temple by Manchu invaders is straight from the history books, but Chang's celebration of the Chinese martial arts turns history into pure national myth. Superb performances. (Chen Kuan-Tai, Fu Sheng.)

*THUNDERBOLT AND LIGHTFOOT (United Artists)

Pleasing first film by Michael Cimino (his direction not quite up to his script) with Clint Eastwood and Jeff Bridges both good as the odd couple (tired professional, impetuous youth) who join shaggy-dog forces in a quest for some missing loot. (George Kennedy, Geoffrey Lewis.)

UNCLE VANYA (Gala)

Miscast and mismanaged adaptation of the Chekhov play which reduces the atmosphere and nuances of the original to a single point, unhappily emphasised by an opening stills montage which announces the coming Revolution. (Innokenty Smoktunovsky, Sergei Bondarchuk; director, Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky.)

WHY— (Variety)

Heart-on-sleeve attack on the Italian penal system, with the initially jovial Alberto Sordi imprisoned without trial and inexorably reduced to catatonia. Passable as a thriller, but the escalation into melodrama hammers the point home so hard that the message finally engulfs the medium. (Elga Andersen, Lino Banfi; director, Nanni Loy.)

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